From Quiet Use to Strategic Leadership: AI in the Charity Sector 2026

Introduction

"There is so much I don't understand. I am interested to know what we could or should be using."

The launch of ChatGPT in 2022 sparked a global investment race - spending on AI is forecast to exceed £2 trillion in 2026. For the UK charity sector, this isn't just another technology cycle—it will change Civil Society far more and far faster than the digital revolution, bringing with it very real risks but also the potential to create a fundamental shift in how we deliver mission-led impact. There is no opt out but done with care, future charities can put AI at the heart of voluntary action.

However, a significant gap has emerged. While three quarters of charities are now using AI in some form, most of this activity remains informal, "quiet," and without clear governance. As one charity puts it "*it feels like standing at the base of a mountain and not knowing which path to take*."

This report draws on the work of Charity Excellence, a sector pioneer in the use of AI since 2022, and will lead on to further work to catalyse the safe and effective adoption of AI within the sector.

The data is drawn from a range of sources. Firstly, 2 of our recent surveys, including our Future Charity AI Survey, conducted online in March 2026 of over 220 UK charity respondents. This survey provides insight into current AI use, attitudes, perceived barriers, support needs and areas of interest. The other looked at AI use in bid writing (205 respondents).

To understand organisational readiness rather than attitudes alone, the report also draws on data from the Charity Excellence Sector Data Store from 2025 and 2026, which tracks 14 AI metrics with aggregated data from thousands of anonymised charity self-assessments. This benchmarking data focuses on whether charities have specific AI governance, risk and operational controls in place, and shows sector-level trends over time.

We also want to recognise and thank others that are working in this field, not least the team behind the wider research, including the Charity Digital Skills Report 2025, Charity Commission for England and Wales research and guidance, public perception research from Charity Tracker and the Charities Aid Foundation, and specialist studies such as The Saltways' research on AI-generated imagery.

We believe that our research is probably the most wide reaching and comprehensive analysis of charity sector AI data carried out to date. Moreover, this report is not just a collection of data; it is an authoritative roadmap

built on the lived experience of the largest charity digital platform in the UK. We reach 780,000 active users annually via our website and hundreds of thousands more through our newsletters, social media and AI systems, reaching right across the charity sector. We serve and champion the small charities that make such a difference.

We don't just report on the sector; we provide the free, simple, and frictionless tools, which enable charities to do more with less. We have combined real-time benchmarking from thousands of anonymised self-assessments with deep insights from our free AI for Charities training programme, an initiative launched in November 2025 in partnership with Microsoft that has already empowered thousands of charity staff and volunteers to move from "fear of the unknown".

This is our evidence-based picture of where the sector stands today. Our next report will build on this foundation to explore what highly effective AI enabled charities will look like, including Charity Excellence 2.0, and what we need to do to get there.

"It's not really resistance. It's that we don't know enough yet."

We are very grateful to the GSR Foundation whose funding makes our work possible. We would also like to thank Microsoft and the people there whom we work with and our corporate partners, who fund and support our work, including those who allow us to access their in-depth technology expertise, often on a pro bono basis.

Executive Summary

"Our organisation understands the importance of keeping up with AI, otherwise we risk being left behind."

AI is no longer "coming"—it is here. But for the circa 0.4 million UK charities, the journey is just beginning. With far too little funding and our people hugely overworked, AI offers us an opportunity to grow fundraising, mitigate overwork and achieve even more. It also offers us the opportunity to radically improve accessibility, not least for the small charities and marginalised groups who make up 95% of the

sector but who are too often excluded. What we do today, will set our course for the future and, for each charity, whatever you do, do not do nothing.

The future is not a forecasting exercise; it's a design exercise. Josh Cohen, Philosopher

The critical findings are:

- The Governance Gap: Both strategic awareness and oversight are lagging. They were and remain the lowest rated metrics - all 3 governance indicators remain "Red" rated in our framework.
- Public Trust at Risk. The Public is not against AI but is wary and supports its use for only certain activities: our now widespread use of AI without adequate oversight has created a significant risk.
- Operational Momentum: Charities are rapidly improving practical AI safeguards like security, data protection and human review but this progress is operational rather than strategic.
- Designing the Future. We are too tiny to change the technology, but what we do with it and how we choose to use it, are within our control – collectively we can create our own future.
- The Trust Paradox: While 62% of our community rates Charity Excellence 10/10 for trustworthiness, the general public remains cautious about charities using AI.
- Keeping a Human Touch: Acceptance is high for "protective" uses like fraud detection (64%) but drops sharply when AI replaces human judgment in beneficiary support.
- Support and Training. Our people are our greatest asset, and AI cannot replace them, but it has the potential to enable them to achieve far more – once we give them the support and training they need.

Trust is the "gold standard" of the charity sector, but right now, it is being tested by a silent shift. While AI is already widespread, much of its use is happening "under the radar"—informal, ungoverned, and often without a clear set of guardrails.

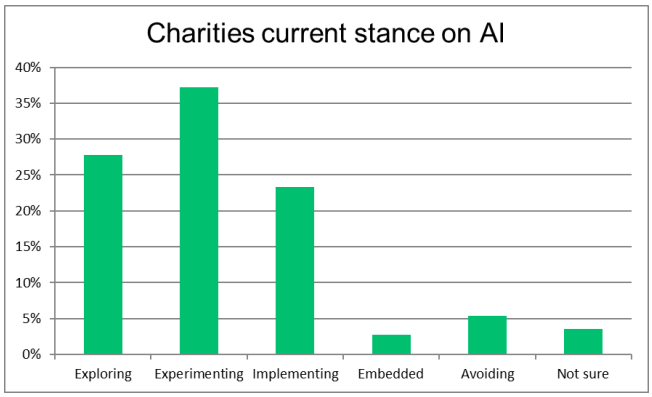
This creates a dangerous gap. While charities see AI as a transformative opportunity, the public remains cautious, with only 13% feeling comfortable with sensitive data entering AI systems. Without the necessary policies and board-level oversight in place, we risk a "loss of the human touch" that could damage the very connection that makes charity work possible.

In our view, the goal isn't just to use the technology of AI in future but to use it safely and transparently so that charities sustain and enhance their effectiveness... and their integrity.

Section 1 – What We Already Know About AI Use in UK Charities

"AI is being used informally, without anyone really talking about it."

Our survey data found that more than 60% of charities remain at the very early stages of using AI, nearly a quarter were embedding it but less than 3% had fully done so. A small but significant group (5%) were actively trying to avoid use. This figure was much higher in our data for bid writing (14%) and very high in the Saltways survey data on the use of AI imagery (55%).



"Lottery spoke about using AI at the Impact Summit. They said they are aware that it is being used and were absolutely ok with applications being supported by AI."

Our survey data found that AI is now a common part of grant bid drafting, but it is rarely used to write applications end-to-end. Charities mainly use AI to save time, improve clarity and tailor responses, while keeping control of tone and content. Funder attitudes remain cautious with messaging sometimes contradictory: some explicitly discourage AI-written bids, and many say they can easily spot generic applications. There appears to be very limited AI specific funding.

"National Lottery told me they can tell an AI-influenced bid a mile away – they don't seem to like it!"

What funders value most has not changed — credibility, originality and a clear human story. The view of some that AI is driving the huge volume of funding applications and that funders can easily spot AI written bids is not supported by the evidence.

The Charity Digital Skills Report 2025 found that 76% of UK charities were using AI in some form, up from 61% the previous year. However, most of this use was informal and ungoverned, such as individuals using generative AI tools independently. Only 2% of charities reported using AI at a strategic level.

Use varied by size. Almost nine in ten charities with incomes over £1 million reported using AI, compared with around seven in ten smaller charities.

By contrast, the Charity Commission's *Trust in Charities 2025* research found that only 3% of trustees said their charity was using AI at all, rising to 8% among larger charities. This highlights a significant gap between what is happening operationally and what boards believe is happening. The Charity Commission has also been explicit that trustees remain legally responsible for how AI is used, including risks around data protection, safeguarding, bias and decision-making. AI does not remove or dilute trustee duties.

Finding: In the charity sector, AI use is already common, but strategic awareness and governance are lagging and there is limited investment by grant makers in funding AI. This gap forms the backdrop for the survey findings that follow.

Resources:

- AI Bid Writing for Charities Best Practice.
- Charity Excellence Learning 3 x AI Fundraising courses. Including bid writing.

Section 2 – Charity Sector AI Readiness

This section draws on the Charity Excellence Sector Data Store, a real-time benchmarking system based on thousands of anonymised charity self-assessments using our health check system. Unlike attitude surveys, this data focuses on whether charities have specific governance, risk and operational controls in place.

It tracks 14 metrics, with results presented using a six-month rolling average, providing a stable picture of sector-level readiness over time. This report used data extracts from early 2025 and 2026. Each metric is rated using a RAG framework:

- Red: most charities have taken few or no steps.
- Amber: partial progress, with significant gaps.
- Green: most charities have the control in place.

As of March 2026, overall, AI readiness across the sector was moderate but improving from a very low base. Progress was uneven, with operational controls developing faster than strategic governance.

Red. All three board-level AI governance controls remained rated Red:

- Strategy - assessing AI's broader organisational and societal impact.
- Allocating AI responsibility to a lead trustee/committee to ensure effective oversight.
- Ensuring everyone is aware of, and is trained, supported and complies with our AI procedures.

A Red rating means most charities have yet to take meaningful action. This aligns closely with Charity Commission data indicating very low trustee awareness of AI use.

"We haven't formally discussed AI at a Trustee meeting yet."

Amber. Operational measures such as:

- Staff/volunteer AI training.
- AI-specific risk assessments.
- AI-related policies.

Were consistently rated Amber, indicating growing but incomplete adoption.

"People are already using it day to day, but it's not really acknowledged and there are no guardrails."

Green. The most mature practices had improved to a green rating, including:

- Security and compliance in using AI systems.
- Safeguarding AI-enabled meetings.
- Human review of AI-generated funding bids.

Since March 2025:

- Red-rated controls had reduced.
- Green-rated controls had tripled, albeit only very recently in 2026.

Improvements were strongest in data protection measures, including DPIAs and policies addressing misinformation and deepfakes. Only one area — strategic assessment of AI's societal impact — had declined slightly.

Finding: The sector is improving how it manages immediate, practical risks, but is struggling to embed AI into management and governance. Successfully adapting to an AI enabled world requires people to be supported and trained, and an holistic approach to revising procedures and embedding new best practice. Consequently, this represents a significant risk, not only to individual charities but also overall trust in the sector.

Resources and Help.

- Charity Excellence AI Ready runs automatically when completing Health Check questionnaires and connect users to a wide range of AI help, resources, toolkits and policies.
- Trustees and Management can also complete the free Charity Excellence Learning Trustees and Management online AI courses.

Section 3 – How Charities View AI Today

"If we fail to appreciate this and to make training available, the digital skills gap will look like a crack in the pavement compared to what's coming."

This section is based on Charity Excellence 2026 survey responses to questions asking respondents how their charity views AI. What they said:

- Around 61% strongly agreed that their charity cannot afford to be left behind.
- Just over 50% strongly agreed that AI is a major opportunity.

"It has been transformative in the way that I work, breaking the blank page and helping me organise my thoughts."

Most respondents do not see AI as "just another technology". Instead, it is viewed as something potentially transformative. However:

- Around 17% strongly disagreed that AI is relevant to their work.

Finding: Just over half see AI as a major opportunity they can't afford to miss out on, but a significant minority do not consider it relevant to their work.

Charity perceptions of AI-generated imagery

Charities are generally cautious and uneasy about using AI-generated imagery, despite some experimentation. Research by The Saltways, found that 55% of charities had no plans to use AI-generated images. While a minority use them occasionally or regularly, a notable proportion reported trying AI imagery and then stopping, suggesting that ethical, reputational or practical concerns outweighed benefits once tested.

The research highlights a clear values tension: over three-quarters of respondents agree that authentic imagery is essential for trust, yet a smaller proportion still use AI images, often driven by cost, speed or safeguarding pressures. Knowledge gaps are significant, with only around one-third reporting a strong understanding of how AI image generation works, and over half of organisations using AI imagery not consistently labelling it, raising concerns about transparency and public trust.

Findings: A substantial number of charities appear to perceive AI imagery use as unethical, although the public view is more nuanced (below). Use of AI imagery by charities needs to be informed by understanding of the Public's perception and evolving AI imagery good practice.

Resources and Help. Charity Excellence has published guides to both AI Imagery Ethics Best Practice and how to Charity Trust and Authenticity in an AI Enabled World.

Section 4 – Perceived Attitudes of Key Stakeholders

"Most of our volunteers are retired, so there is a lot of uncertainty and nervousness about AI."

This section is based on Charity Excellence survey questions that invited respondents to rate how different groups feel about their organisation using AI. What respondents perceived:

- Management teams are the most positive, with nearly half strongly supportive.
- Trustees and staff are broadly positive but cautious.
- Volunteers and beneficiaries are more divided, with around one in five perceived as strongly opposed.

Finding: Support for AI is uneven and often values-driven. Successful adoption will require support and training for people - change management not just technology.

Resources and Help. Charity Excellence Learning offers 11 free online AI courses that require not previous AI knowledge and are suitable for everyone in a charity.

"Grant makers strongly advocated against the use of AI. This seemed to be a uniform view across the funders."

Section 5 – How the Public Perceive AI Use

Across the UK, public attitudes to AI are cautious, conditional, and increasingly concerned, rather than openly hostile or enthusiastic. Large-scale national surveys consistently show that while awareness of AI is high, trust remains fragile and many people feel they lack sufficient understanding to feel confident about its use. AI is generally seen as acceptable when it assists humans, but there is much lower acceptance where it replaces human judgement, particularly in areas such as employment decisions, welfare, healthcare, and public services. Concerns about fairness, loss of human control, and misuse are persistent and widely shared across demographic groups. (Sources: Gov.UK Wave 4 tracker, Ipsos What the public thinks about AI).

A dominant theme across UK datasets is anxiety about work, jobs, and economic security. ONS, Ipsos, NatCen and Government-commissioned research all find that substantial proportions of the public believe AI is likely to increase unemployment or negatively affect workers, even where people also

acknowledge potential productivity benefits. Support for AI is highest where people retain choice, transparency is clear, and regulation is seen as keeping pace. A strong majority of the UK public believes additional regulation is needed, particularly to safeguard against unfair decisions, data misuse, and employment harms. Overall, the public mood can best be described as "engage with care" rather than resistance to AI as such. (Sources: ONS, Natsen and KPMG.

Section 6 - How the Public Perceive Charity AI Use

"The marketing and comms team are keen to ensure that our authentic voice is not lost and that public trust remains high."

This section draws on multiple strands of evidence, including Charity Tracker, CAF and the University of East Anglia, each answering a slightly different question about public attitudes. Together, these sources provide a rounded picture of public and donor, as well as the wider trust environment charities operate within.

A public that is cautious, not hostile

The clearest UK charity-specific evidence comes from Charity Tracker's Public Perceptions research. This shows that public opinion on charities using AI is divided but not polarised.

- 36% of UK adults say they feel positive about charities using AI.
- 27% feel negative.
- 37% say they are unsure.

This split suggests that most people are still forming their views, rather than holding fixed opinions. Acceptance is strongly linked to familiarity: older people and those with little personal experience of AI are consistently less comfortable with its use. The overall picture is not one of rejection, but of conditional acceptance.

Strong support for "protective" and back-office uses.

Public support increases sharply when AI is used for purposes that are easy to understand and clearly beneficial. According to Charity Tracker:

- 64% of people say it is acceptable for charities to use AI to detect fraud and scams.
- 53% are comfortable with AI being used for administrative tasks, such as scheduling or financial planning.

These uses are generally seen as protecting charitable funds or supporting staff, rather than replacing people or changing the nature of charitable relationships. This mirrors findings from CAF's international research, where efficiency and helping more people were consistently among the most positively rated benefits of charities using AI.

Sharp drop in trust when AI affects human decisions.

Public comfort falls away most sharply when AI is perceived to influence who gets help. Charity Tracker found that:

- 38% of respondents think it is unacceptable for charities to use AI to help decide who receives support.
- 33% think this is acceptable.

Opposition is strongest among older people, with 46% of those aged over 55 opposed to AI being used in decisions about allocating support.

The concern here is not the technology itself, but its role in high-stakes, human-centred judgement, where empathy, discretion and accountability are expected to remain central. This aligns closely with CAF's UK focus groups, where participants repeatedly emphasised that AI should be used alongside humans, not instead of them.

Data, privacy and "loss of the human touch"

Across all studies, concerns about data and human connection are persistent. Charity Tracker found that:

- Only 13% of people are comfortable with sensitive personal data being used in AI systems.
- 36% cite data security risks as a key concern.
- 35% worry about losing the human element of charity work.
- 31% are concerned about serious mistakes being made.

These concerns closely reflect themes seen in the charity sector survey itself, suggesting alignment between public unease and internal charity caution. CAF's research reinforces this, showing that in the UK, people are almost twice as likely to prioritise workforce reduction as a risk compared with data breaches (34% versus 18%), highlighting sensitivity around job losses and erosion of personal connection.

Trust depends more on *who* than on technology.

The UK Government's Public Attitudes to Data and AI Tracker Survey (Wave 4) is not charity-specific, but it provides important context for understanding trust. The survey shows that public willingness to share data and accept AI use depends far more on trust in the organisation involved than on technical safeguards alone. Trust varies sharply by institution:

- The NHS is trusted by 85%.
- Academic researchers by 76%
- Government by 38%
- Social media companies by 33%

The implication for charities is clear: institutional trust matters enormously. Public acceptance of AI use is likely to depend on whether a charity is perceived as acting in the public's best interests and being accountable, rather than on claims about efficiency or innovation.

The tracker also shows widespread AI use in everyday life — six in ten people report using AI chatbots recently — but seven in ten say they know little or nothing about how AI systems are trained. This combination of use without understanding helps explain why concern often outweighs confidence.

AI imagery and the risk to authenticity

Research into AI-generated imagery highlights a specific reputational risk. A study by the University of East Anglia warns that AI-generated images can act as an "AI shortcut" to empathy, potentially undermining trust rather than strengthening it. Public reactions to AI imagery are divided:

- Around 40% find it acceptable.
- 31% find it unacceptable.

The concern is not just about disclosure, but about authenticity and representation. Research suggests that heavy reliance on synthetic imagery can spark suspicion, shift attention away from real experiences, and weaken emotional connection — particularly in sensitive or trust-dependent campaigns. An AI generated cartoon of Santa Claus for a Christmas poster is probably unlikely to create a significant response but an emotional image that appears hyper realistic may well do so, even if it is marked as AI generated. Equally, use of AI imagery by causes that are perceived to be linked to ethical AI issues, such as the environment or art, will be more likely to be contentious.

What this tells us about public expectations

Across all sources, a consistent picture emerges:

- The public is not opposed to charities using AI.
- Acceptance is conditional and context-dependent - who uses it, what they do with it and how they do that.
- There is strong permission for AI to support efficiency, protect funds and reduce fraud.
- There is much less tolerance for AI replacing human judgement, shaping narratives about vulnerable people, or operating without transparency.

Findings: The public is not against our use of AI and its trust is, at least in part dependent on the type of organisations using AI – and we are very trusted. However, the Public is cautious and that trust conditional. The current extensive charity use of AI without visible, effective governance, clear human control, and honest communication creates a risk of our own making. That must change because trust is critical for charities and will be even more so in an AI enabled world of slop, scams and fake news. We need intentional transparency: being explicit about why AI is used, where humans remain in charge, how data is protected, and where AI will *not* be used.

Section 7 – Barriers to AI Adoption

"Objections to AI aren't just resistance, they often highlight real risks."

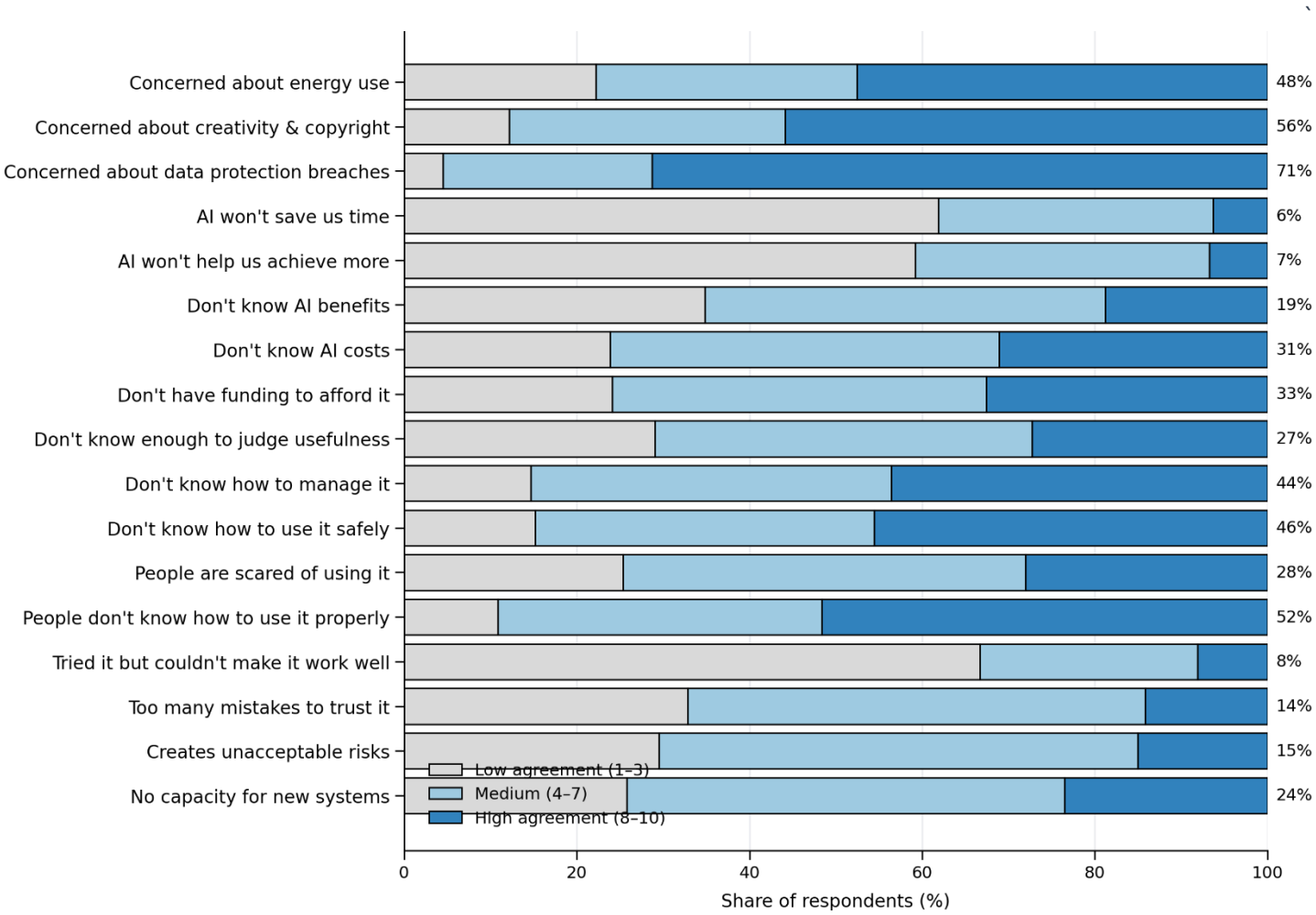
The key barriers can be grouped into 2 key areas. Firstly, concerns about legal and ethical issues (data protection, energy use, and creativity/copyright) and concern about ability to manage and use AI safely.

More than a third (37%) rated data protection risks at the highest level of concern. That is 10/10 on our scoring scale of 1 to 10. And more than a quarter (26%) rated concerns about copyright and creativity equally highly.

"It's not resistance, it's fear of the unknown and not knowing how to use it safely."

Finding: Resistance is often rational and thoughtful, not anti-technology. At sector level we need to provide the information and tools to give charities confidence and charities need to support and train their people.

The visual below identifies the barriers to adoption. The percentages on the right are how many charities feel the issue is a problem for them.



Section 8 – What Support Charities Say They Need

"We need training in plain English, not tech jargon."

This section is based on open-text survey responses asking what support would help charities make better use of AI. What charities are asking for:

- Practical, role-specific training.
- Clear guidance on safe and ethical use.
- Ready-to-use policies and templates.
- Funding and time to create capacity.

Finding: Charities need practical support, guidance and tools that meet their needs.

"Time and capacity are the real problem, not willingness."

Resources and Help.

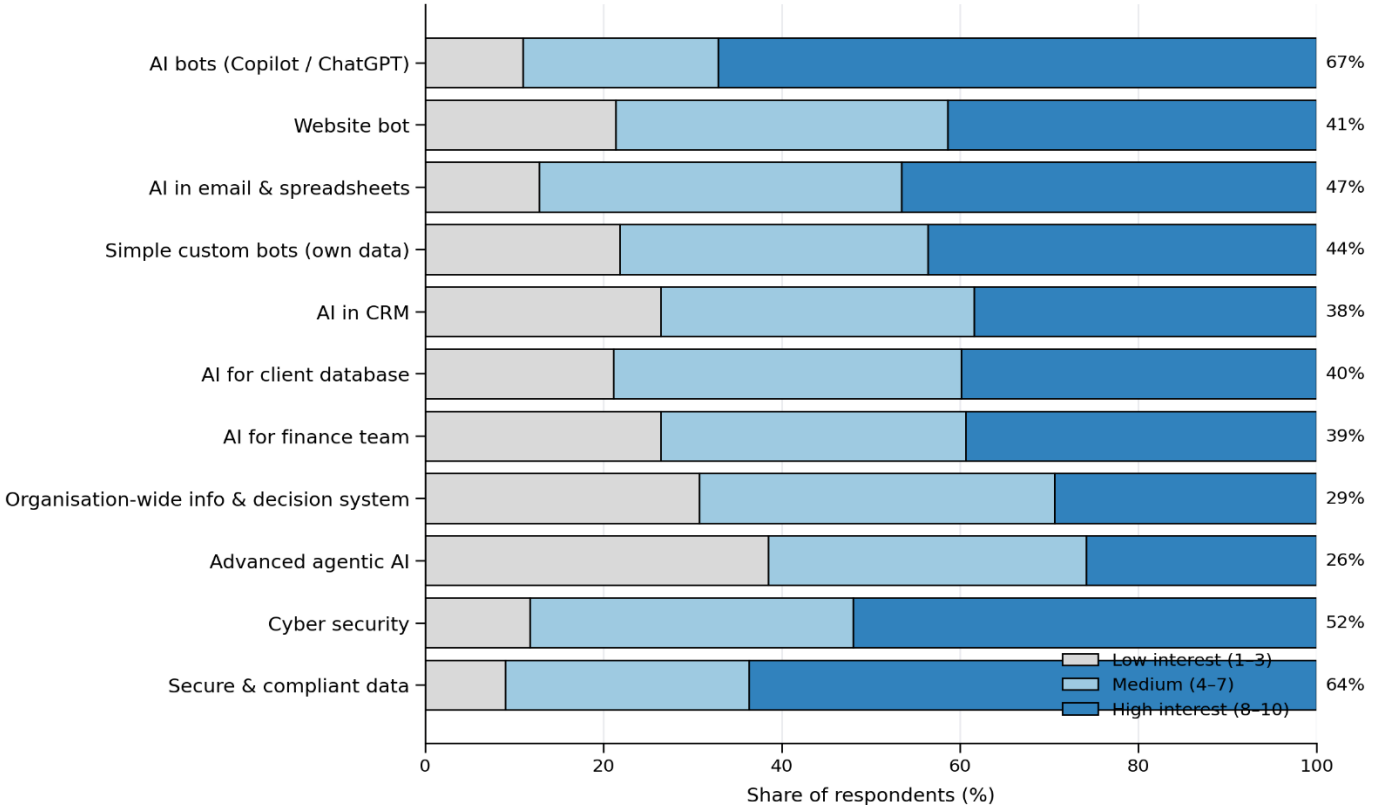
- **Training.** Trustees and Management can also complete the free Charity Excellence Learning Trustees and Management online AI courses.
- **Best Practice.** Charity Excellence AI Ready runs automatically when completing Health Check questionnaires and connect users to a wide range of AI help, resources, toolkits and policies.
- **Policies.** 60+ policies can be downloaded by logging in to Charity Excellence; where appropriate, policies have been updated to reflect AI requirements.
- **Funding.** There is very little UK AI funding for non-profits. We will launch a tech and innovation funding list soon of funders who may well be open to an AI application.

Section 9 – Areas of Interest for AI Use

This section is based on survey ratings of interest in different AI applications. Interest levels varied sharply across the AI options that were rated.

Practical, familiar tools such as AI bots like Copilot, AI within email and spreadsheets, and data security and cyber protection attracted consistently high interest, probably reflecting their visibility, low barrier to entry and personal productivity benefits.

By contrast, several options generated much more polarised responses, with significant numbers rating them very highly and others very low. These include creating simple custom bots using an organisation's own data, using AI within CRMs or client databases, creating a whole-organisation information and decision system, and creating advanced agentic AI. For some respondents, particularly those in larger or more digitally mature organisations, these options represent the next logical step. For others, the same options raise immediate concerns about data protection, safeguarding, governance, accountability and loss of human control. The visual below shows how interested charities are in various aspects of AI. The percentage on the right is how many respondents had a high interest. The highest level of interest was in data protection and compliance with more than a third (35%) rating this 10/10. Nearly a third rated cyber security (31%) and the use of Chat Bots (31%), such as Microsoft's Copilot equally highly.



"Agentic AI looks like a pot of poison for people-centred organisations."

The most advanced options are also the least well understood. Many respondents indicated they were unsure what these terms mean in practice or associated them with AI acting autonomously rather than as a support tool.

Findings. This aligns with findings elsewhere in the report showing that knowledge gaps, rather than hostility, underpin much of the sector's caution.

Ian

Ian McLintock | Founder
ian@charityexcellence.co.uk
www.charityexcellence.co.uk

Bibliography

Charity Excellence Data

1. AI Survey March 2026 (where we are now March 2026).

2. Grant Makers Survey 2026 (AI Sections – bid writing).
3. Charity Data Store – Data Extracts 2025 and 2026 (14 AI Ready metrics).
4. AI Survey 2024 (charity sector use of AI).

Work by Others

We are very happy to recognise work by other organisations that informed our work and which is credited with the report where used.

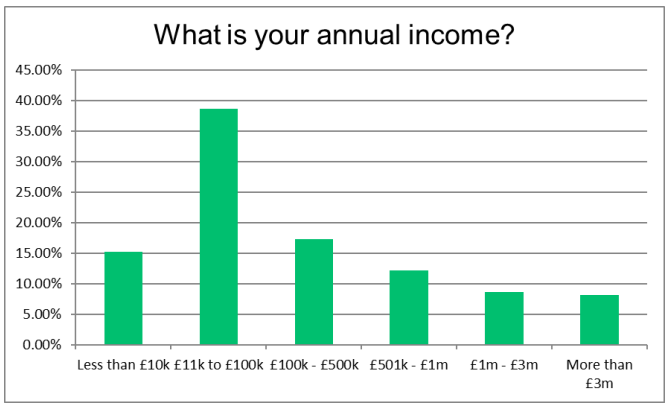
1. Charity Digital Skills Report 2025: Zoe Amar Digital, Media Trust, CAST
   Trust in Charities 2025: Charity Commission for England and Wales
   Charities and Artificial Intelligence – Trustee Guidance: Charity Commission for England and Wales
2. AI adoption among charities shows no sign of slowing down: Zoe Amar, *Civil Society*, March 2026.
3. CAST Charity AI Survey 2026.
4. Charity Tracker Public Perceptions research, a UK-wide survey of 3,000 adults conducted in December 2025 and reported by *Civil Society* in February 2026, which focused specifically on charities' use of AI.
5. Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) international research into public views on charities using AI, based on over 6,000 respondents across 10 countries, with additional UK focus groups.
6. UK Government Public Attitudes to Data and AI Tracker Survey (Wave 4), published by DSIT in December 2024, which provides context on public trust in AI and data use (but is not charity-specific).
7. University of East Anglia – Public Perceptions of AI Imagery.
8. The Saltways, AI-Generated Imagery in the Charity Sector, February 2026.
9. Office for National Statistics (ONS) – *Public opinions and social trends: artificial intelligence* (rolling dataset, 2024–25).
10. Ipsos UK + Tony Blair Institute – *What the UK thinks about AI* (Sept 2025).
11. NatCen / Ada Lovelace Institute / Alan Turing Institute – *How does the public feel about Artificial Intelligence?* (March 2025).
12. KPMG UK / University of Melbourne – *Trust, Attitudes and Use of Artificial Intelligence: UK findings* (April 2025).

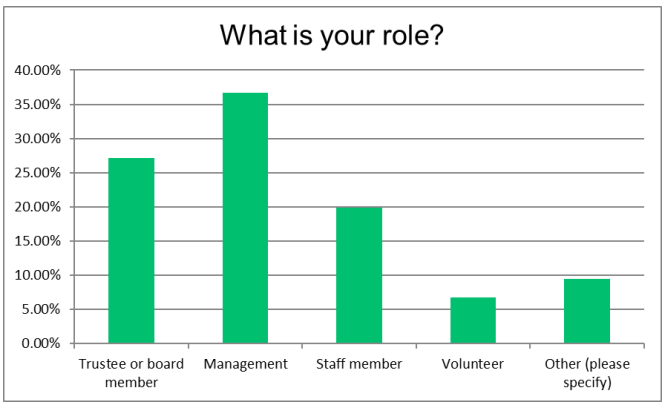
Methodology

This report brings together multiple sources of evidence to build a rounded picture of where the charity sector is today in relation to AI. No single dataset is treated as definitive; instead, findings are triangulated across surveys, sector benchmarking and external research. However, there are an estimated 0.5m UK non-profits, comprising some 1 million staff and 13 million volunteers, spanning a

very wide range of causes and ranging in size from micro charities (under £10k pa) to huge charities more than £100 million pa.

Survey Data. The Future Charity AI Survey 2026, was an online survey of over 220 respondents from UK charities of different sizes and roles, including trustees, managers, staff and volunteers. This survey provides insight into current AI use, attitudes, perceived barriers, support needs and areas of interest. The report also draws on survey data on AI use in fundraising from our grant makers survey (205 respondents) March 2026. The surveys were widely promoted but completion was on a self-selection basis.





Charity Excellence Data Store. To understand organisational readiness rather than attitudes alone, the report also draws on data from the Charity Excellence Sector Data Store, which tracks 500 metrics and aggregates data from thousands of anonymised charity self-assessments using a rolling 6-month average. It uses data from 2025 with 2026. More than 2000 questionnaires are scored in a 6-month period. The system measures what's important, not what can be measured, so it uses self-assessment against multiple objective criteria explained in plain English in each questionnaire statement.

The 14 AI metrics were activated in Jan 25 and focus on whether charities have specific AI governance, risk and operational controls in place. The systems 'AI Ready' assessment adds existing trust, cyber security and data protection to these by tracking a total of 54 metrics.

The Charity Excellence data set mirrors the 'charity sector pyramid'. However, we think it's under-represented at micro charity level (under £10k), albeit we cannot be certain as the actual micro charity numbers are unknown.

Desktop Research. Survey and benchmarking findings are placed in context using external sector and public research, including the Charity Digital Skills Report 2025, Charity Commission for England and Wales research and guidance, public perception research from Charity Tracker and the Charities Aid Foundation, and specialist studies such as The Saltways' research on AI-generated imagery. These sources

are used to validate patterns, highlight gaps, and reflect how charities are perceived by donors and the wider public.

Reporting Approach. Percentages are used throughout to aid readability. Where Likert scales are reported, analysis focuses on clear patterns (such as strong agreement or concern) rather than statistical precision. Qualitative comments are summarised into themes and also quoted directly, as part of our commitment to ensure the voices of front line-charities are heard directly.

Limitations

- The Future Charity AI Survey was self-selecting, and the respondent numbers are small compared to the numbers of charities in the UK.
- Charity Excellence benchmarking data is based on objective, self-assessment but that is not as robust as independent verification.
- Public attitude research varies in scope, and not all sources are charity-specific.

Collectively, we think that the evidence provides a robust, indicative view of the sector, suitable for understanding current maturity, confidence and risk but not for making precise population-level claims.

Ethics Note

The Charity Excellence AI Survey Agent was used in adducing and analysing data but under the direction and control of a human.