

Charity Excellence 2.0: Making Small Charities Findable, Fundable and Future-Ready

A Transformational Vision for the Non-Profit Sector

The only way to deliver the large scale, low cost, UK wide functional support charities tell us they want is by a technology solution.

It's the most useful website I have come across since joining the charity sector - there's such a wealth of information here I've only scratched the surface of,...!

AI offers us a huge strategic opportunity to build on that, but it brings real risks too, charities are as yet ill-prepared for AI and what they want is locally delivered functional support and not an AI only solution.

We've spent 2 years building the data set and 6 months on research and listening - we have a solution.

Charity Excellence will be re-imagined from a hugely popular and trusted platform to a low-cost, UK wide, social franchise that taps into and promotes the huge collective expertise of the sector and is accessible to and meets the needs of everyone.

Our aim is to help charities to survive, stabilise and then thrive.

Help us to make that possible by donating to our [Charity Excellence 2.0 Crowd Funder](#), thank you.

A 6 Year Crisis with Worse to Come?

What we see in the data, and hear directly from charities, is a sector that has not recovered from successive crises since 2020 and remains financially fragile. Fundraising has not returned to pre-crisis levels, and charities have limited capacity to absorb further shocks. Sector analysis indicates a high risk of a further downturn linked to global instability, with the impact on income and demand expected to become more pronounced from Autumn 2026. If a further crisis arrives, our data shows it is likely to be the deepest and longest yet. Action is urgently needed and there is little time to respond.

Small Charities Vital but Disproportionately Impacted

Currently running in deficit supported by reserves. They will be exhausted in maximum 2 years. If not successful in accessing additional funds by then will be forced to close.

Small charities are particularly exposed. They make up around 95% of the UK's approximately 0.5 million non-profits yet are more likely to operate at a deficit and are less likely to access government funding. Evidence shows they are disproportionately affected by rising costs, income volatility and increased demand. At the same time, the number of small infrastructure bodies providing support to these charities has been declining, reducing local capacity and access to help. There are maybe 600 to 700 UK wide,

national, regional and local, from tiny volunteer networks with a dozen members, to organisations with staff and in excess of 10k members, and the activities they undertake can be very diverse. We have spent the last 2 years creating a searchable, AI friendly data set of the UK infrastructure bodies.

We are encountering increasing overhead costs and using up our reserves. We will close if this is not rectified!

What They Told Us They Want

I rated national infrastructure support as I did, not because it's not important but because it currently doesn't seem to be there! By far the most valuable support we receive or see is thanks to the wonderful networks like SIDCN and the amazing CEF resources!

Survey evidence highlights a consistent gap between the support charities need and what they can access. Around 64% report difficulty finding support, while only 2% say they can do so easily. However, 72% indicate that access to the right support would have a real or major impact on their charity. They also told us how desperate the funding position is. There will be a focus on deploying both existing and new capabilities to support income generation both for infrastructure bodies and the charities they support.

Charities consistently prioritised practical, locally delivered support over national provision, and want functional, support, in areas such as fundraising, governance and volunteering.

We're fed up of endless online volunteer sites with no local bureau or 'recruitment agency' for matching and attracting volunteers.

The Huge Opportunity of AI

AI is widely recognised across the sector as a significant strategic opportunity, but adoption remains at an early stage. Use is often informal and not fully governed, and concerns persist around data protection, ethics and risk management. Infrastructure organisations report that an AI only approach would not meet the needs of many charities, with a substantial proportion requiring human support alongside any technological solution.

Why Charity Excellence is Well Placed to Respond

Thank you to Iain at Charity Excellence for always having the small charities back!

We operate a free, UK-wide platform supporting approximately 50,000 members, providing access to funding, functional support and resources. Our in-system feedback ratings are 9/10 and ongoing community survey feedback indicates high levels of trust, with 62% of respondents rating us 10/10 for trustworthiness. We have been developing and deploying AI tools since 2022 and have produced a range of policies, guidance and training resources to support effective and safe use; 44% of our 1000s of AI learners rate us 10/10. [Read our case studies](#) to see the very human impact our technology support has.

Thank you for all that you do and all the support you give to us 'smalls'.

In a world of very little funding, we are extremely low cost (FY25/26 £85k) and, even at a fully sustainable funding level (in 2 years), will cost no more than £250k pa. We will increase staffing from 1.5 people to 3.5, enabling us to deliver more accessible and even better services to far more people.

Fabulous resource, very easy to use and understand.

An Ambitious, Deliverable Way Forward for the Sector

There isn't enough funding and there isn't going to be, and the crisis is now so deep that only a bold, easily and rapidly scalable, low-cost solution will deliver the impact needed. We asked charities to rate options and there was strong demand across all 8, so these were all built into the new model. It will create a searchable UK wide network of infrastructure support, give the network powerful new capabilities and make it accessible to everyone.

The deployed system will meet the infrastructure bodies' diverse needs, because we will allow each to choose what they want from a range of options; think a tiny Apple App Store in concept. The AI tools will be designed to be practical and accessible, with each agent performing a specific function. Importantly, they will also operate alongside human support to mitigate digital exclusion and ensure accessibility for charities that cannot effectively engage with them independently.

The next step is to begin designing and building these and, as always our work is led by you. Join our movement for change by [completing this short survey](#) about what capabilities you want us to create, thank you.

Making it Work for You

- **Making Sure Your Voice Continues to be Heard (Summer 2026).** The six-month survey, research and design phase is complete and has provided a clear evidence base. The next step is to run a co-creation pilot, ideally over the summer, to validate what people actually need in practice and ensure what we build works effectively. While we can already develop individual AI tools, the priority now is to design these around real user need and ensure they function as part of a coherent system rather than isolated solutions. This phase will also focus on understanding how the approach can best be utilised by infrastructure charities. Once both user needs and delivery models are proven, we will be ready to scale.
- **Promoting You to Everyone (Autumn 2026).** Following the pilot and final build phase, we will deploy the UK dataset and the supporting agent that enables it to be used effectively. This will make charities and infrastructure bodies far more visible, allowing them to be easily found by other organisations, funders, media and government. The aim is to ensure any non-profit can quickly connect with the support, partnerships and resources it needs.
 - We have also begun uploading infrastructure body local data sources into Data Finder to make these findable.
- **Meeting Your Needs – Charity Excellence App Store (End 2026 – Mid 2027).** The sector is highly diverse and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. To address this, we will develop a “Charity

Excellence App Store” model. Over approximately six months, we will build and deploy a suitable range of simple, single-use AI tools (“agents”), alongside integrating and scaling existing services such as the grants directories, Help Finder and policy downloads. Organisations will then be able to select the tools and capabilities they need, creating a flexible, user-led system built around practical application.

- **Maximising Accessibility for Everyone – Chat to Charity Excellence (Spring 2027).** Subject to funding and capacity, we will introduce an MCP (Model Context Protocol) layer, enabling users to interact directly with the system through a conversational interface. This will allow people to “chat” with Charity Excellence, accessing not only website content but also internal systems, datasets and directories. The result will be a more intuitive and accessible way to find funding, information and support, reducing barriers for organisations with limited time or technical capacity.

Subject to securing funding, we will go further:

- **Making Best Use of Limited Sector Resources – Data-Driven Decision Making (Autumn 2027).** We hold a Charity Sector Data Store containing over one million data points, built on 500 metrics that have tracked every aspect of sector performance since 2018. This underpins our existing trend forecasting and modelling, but we have not previously had the capacity to make this widely accessible. Using MCP, we will enable sector bodies and others to access this data directly, supporting better, evidence-based decision-making at all levels.
- **Making the Very Best Use of Those Resources – Future-Focused Decision Making.** Building on this foundation, we will develop predictive analytics to move decision-making from reactive to forward-looking. This will enable charities and sector bodies to plan ahead, allocate resources more effectively, and improve decisions relating to policy, training and funding. In a context where resources are limited and demand continues to grow; this will help maximise impact across the sector.

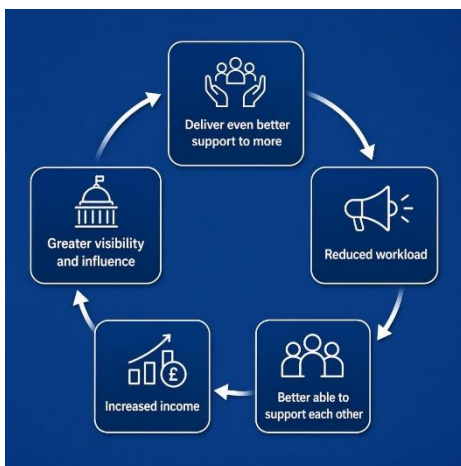
A “Righteous Cycle” - Reversing the Decline

Most small charities are too small to make their voices heard and the growing impact of AI on website traffic is making this even worse. We will respond by:

- Small charities are becoming less visible because AI answers reduce website visits and prioritise larger, well-structured organisations- Charity Excellence 2.0 will make them much more visible by structuring their information so AI can find, trust, and surface it in answers.
- Using our very extensive reach to promote this UK wide network to the 500k non-profits.
 - Our weekly newsletter alone is sent to 100k+.
- Use our data set to make their local and niche expertise findable by anyone.
 - Additionally, sector level bodies will be able to use the information available within our data set to inform policy making and resource allocation.
- In Phase 2, we will build and deploy new technology that will enable them to not only offer greater support but also.

- Reach far more charities in need, including:
- The many who need human support and would otherwise be excluded from access to AI and.
- Reduce workload on infrastructure bodies by using our *do it once, do it well, and give it to everyone* approach to remove duplication of effort.

Enabling infrastructure bodies to **deliver even better support to more charities** is the starting point in our righteous cycle to reverse the decline.



- **Reduced workload** will free up hard pressed staff to focus on the things that matter most.
- Support groups will grow and their members **become better able to support each other**.
- **Increased income** from the deployed income generation capabilities, plus our promotion of paid membership and services.
- The Media, Government and others will be able to find and tap into deep local and specialist expertise, giving them a real voice with **greater visibility and influence**.

And those drivers will deliver even better support to even more charities, reinforcing the cycle.

Survey evidence indicates strong support from charities for what we plan to do, with charities assessing that it would have a significant impact on their ability to operate effectively.

Minimising Cost and Maximising Value for Money

The key to delivering transformational change at very low cost is to use AI agents to fully exploit existing sector resources - our unique data sets, current services, and the UK wide network of infrastructure bodies. The AI agents will be simple to use, focused on user needs and low cost both to build and run, and will integrate these 3 resources, making them both available and accessible to everyone, whilst being managed locally by humans.

The cost of building the dataset and deploying the initial AI agents is relatively low, with estimated development costs of approximately £20,000 for the dataset and initial launch with a further £60,000 for the whole programme. Cash running costs will be around £1,000 per month depending on usage. Cost is driven by usage.

Risk - Practical, Robust and Deliverable

The proposal is based on our Charity Excellence system data, plus 6 of our own surveys and reports and more than a dozen existing reports and studies, by others, providing a very robust evidence base for the analysis and planned delivery. See below.

We have significant expertise in this field, and we are primarily using AI agentic technology to connect, exploit and make accessible existing resources. The AI technology is already in existence and is not complex to build or deploy. The primary risk is to secure funding. The programme has been kept low cost to build and run, and we can stage deployment so we only build out the capability bit-by-bit if we cannot initially fully secure funding. The cost in delaying is that that the sector is in crisis, and this would delay responding to that.

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