

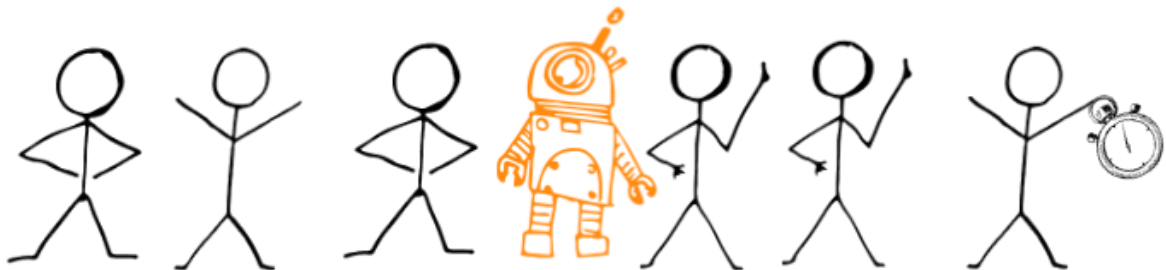
AI for Charities

An 8-Part Intro Guide for Organisations



By Blumer Tayo R.

The charity sector is at a turning point. AI is no longer a future consideration - it is already reshaping how organisations raise funds, manage finances, deliver services, and demonstrate impact. This guide was written for charity leaders, finance leads, and decision makers who want to move from vague awareness to confident, informed action. No jargon. No vendor pitches. Just clear thinking about where AI can genuinely help - and where it can't. Each Part builds on the last, taking you from the big picture to practical first steps.



The Mission Doesn't Change - But How You Deliver It Can.

Three quarters of UK charities are now using AI. A year ago, that figure was closer to six in ten. Something has shifted - and if you lead a charity, it's worth pausing to ask: is your organisation moving with it, or watching from the sideline?

Let me be clear about something upfront. This isn't a post about technology for technology's sake. It's about mission. About the children supported, the communities fed, the lives changed. AI doesn't alter why you do what you do. But it is beginning to change what's possible in how you do it.

The Sector Is Already Moving

Three quarters of UK charities are now engaging with AI tools - up from 61% the year before. Of those, over a fifth are actively piloting or deploying AI across their organisations. This isn't a future trend. It's happening now, in organisations just like yours.

And yet, the same data reveals a striking gap. While many charities are using AI to support their work, just 11% have implemented it organisation-wide, and only 5% are actively building structures like AI policy or data governance. Most are experimenting informally - a team member using ChatGPT here, an automated report there - without strategy or structure behind it.

That gap between using AI and leading with AI is where this guide lives. Most organisations will not close that gap without deliberate ownership, structure, and investment. Informal use does not become strategy by accident.

A Moment I Recognise

I've sat in enough transformation meetings to know the conversation well. Someone raises AI. A few people nod cautiously. Someone else raises concerns about data, about ethics, about whether it's really appropriate for a values-led organisation. The item gets noted. The meeting moves on.

That caution isn't wrong - 59% of charities express concerns about ethical implications, data privacy, and the risk of bias. Those concerns deserve serious answers, not dismissal. But caution without curiosity is a strategy for being left behind. So, before that operational meeting moves on - to really get things going - ask this question - *Who in this organisation is accountable for moving this forward—and do they have the time and authority to do it?* And before you conclude it should be IT - consider the last time IT was left on their own to resolve an operational problem.

One Question to Start With

Before moving to Part 2, ask your team one simple question: where does admin get in the way of our mission? The answers will tell you exactly where to start and then you assign this as a strategic project to the right person within your organisation.

Source: Charity Digital Skills Report 2025 | This is Part 1 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

More Impact, Less Admin - What AI Actually Does for Charities.

Ask most charity leaders what they'd do with an extra ten hours a week, and you'll get the same answer: more time with beneficiaries, deeper work with funders, better strategy. What you won't hear is 'more data entry' or 'another round of board report drafting.' Yet that's where the time goes. And that's precisely where AI is beginning to make a difference.

Let's Be Clear About What AI Is - and Isn't

AI isn't a robot that runs your charity. It's not a replacement for your team, your judgement, or your relationships. At its most practical, it's a capable assistant that handles repetitive, time-consuming tasks so your people can focus on the work that requires them specifically. Nearly half of UK charities are now using AI to reduce admin - summarising meeting transcripts, drafting communications, and generating reports.

Where It's Actually Making a Difference

Admin and communications: Around 46% of charities are now using AI tools for admin tasks - from drafting emails to summarising meetings, a significant jump from 32% the previous year. Tools already embedded in Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace handle much of this without any additional cost.

Impact reporting: Compiling evidence for funders has long been one of the most time-consuming tasks in the sector. AI tools can now pull together outcomes, case studies, and trend data to produce draft reports in a fraction of the usual time - turning what was once a weeks-long process into hours.

Fundraising: Organisations using AI for prospect research are reporting significant increases in appeal response rates and average gift size. AI doesn't replace the relationship - it helps your team identify the right people, at the right time, with the right message.

Service accessibility: Some charities are using AI to make their services more inclusive. WECIL, a Bristol-based disability charity, created an AI chatbot designed to function like an Easy Read document - combining accessible language and visual options to help users find the right information.

What AI Shouldn't Do

If you cannot clearly explain why a process should be automated—and what the human role remains—you are not ready to automate it. Major donor relationships, crisis communications, safeguarding decisions, and trustee-level judgement calls all require human wisdom that AI cannot replicate. Any charity leader who automates these areas is solving the wrong problem. The question isn't 'what can AI do?' It's 'what should humans be doing instead?' This is where many organisations move too quickly and create risk they don't yet understand.

A Note for Finance Leads

Donors increasingly scrutinise how much of their contribution reaches the frontline. AI offers charities a direct route to reduce the administrative cost base - spending less on process and more on active charitable work. That's a compelling case to make to any board or funding body.

The Takeaway

AI won't transform your charity overnight. Nobody has yet found a single game-changing use case - but small wins are accumulating, and organisations are beginning to get more structured in how they assess and adopt these tools. That's exactly the right pace. Start with one process. Prove the value. Build from there.

Sources: Charity Digital Skills Report 2025; Directory of Social Change; Rathbones Charity Insights

This is Part 2 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

The £0 Starting Point - Free and Low-Cost AI Tools Worth Knowing.

The number one reason charity leaders give for not engaging with AI is budget. It's understandable - but increasingly, it's also not the barrier it once was. Many of the most useful AI tools available right now cost nothing. And several of the tools your team already uses every day have AI built in, quietly waiting to be switched on.

Start With What You Already Have

Access to tools is not the same as readiness to use them. Most organisations overestimate the former and underestimate the latter. Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace both offer AI-powered features to eligible nonprofits, in many cases at heavily reduced or no cost. If your charity already uses either platform, you may have access to AI drafting, summarisation, and data tools without any additional spend. Canva's premium features - including its AI writing tool - are available free to eligible charities, helping teams generate headlines, captions, and content without starting from scratch.

Tools Worth Exploring

For writing and communications, ChatGPT's free tier handles drafting, brainstorming, and editing well. Nonprofits can access discounts on premium plans, which offer faster responses, advanced reasoning, and file handling - typically around £20 per month.

For grant writing specifically, AI tools trained on funding bids can analyse funder requirements and help structure compelling applications - saving hours of drafting time per bid.

For meeting notes and transcription, tools like Microsoft Copilot can summarise calls and generate action points automatically, removing one of the most time-consuming admin tasks from the week.

A Note on Free Tiers

Free doesn't mean unlimited. Most free AI tools have usage caps, slower response times, or restricted features. Before committing your team to any tool, test it properly - if testing is not structured, you will generate activity—not evidence. against a real task. Ask: does it save time? Does the output need heavy editing? Is it suitable to use with your data? When choosing an AI tool, check whether it integrates with systems you already use, has been approved for work use, and provides the functionality you need.

How to Access Discounts

TechSoup UK manages a catalogue of donated and discounted software for charities. If there's a specific tool you want, search '[tool name] nonprofit' - many providers offer discounts not widely advertised.

The Takeaway

Budget is rarely the real barrier. The real barrier is time - time to explore, test, and decide. Set aside two hours this month to try one tool against one real task. That's all it takes to move from curious to confident.

Sources: TechSoup UK; Give as you Live; Charity Excellence Framework

This is Part 3 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

Where Does the Money Go? AI's Role in Smarter Financial Decisions.

For finance leads and trustees, AI raises a practical question: where can it strengthen financial management - and where does it introduce risk? The answer is more useful than most finance teams realise.

The Admin Burden Is Real

Finance functions in charities carry a disproportionate admin load. Budget tracking, management accounts, funder reporting, payroll reconciliation - much of it manual, repetitive, and time-consuming. Some charities report saving 200 hours of staff time monthly through intelligent financial automation alone. That's not a rounding error. That's the equivalent of a part-time role, redirected to mission-critical work.

What AI Can Do for Finance Teams

Automated accounting tools handle data entry, reconciliation, and report generation with strong accuracy. AI can flag anomalies in spend patterns that might otherwise take weeks to surface. It can generate draft management accounts, produce funder reports from existing data, and model budget scenarios far faster than spreadsheet-based approaches.

For not-for-profit finance specifically, where restricted and unrestricted funds must be tracked separately and reported against multiple funders simultaneously, AI-assisted categorisation and reporting tools can dramatically reduce the margin for error.

The Donor Transparency Argument

Donors increasingly scrutinise how much of their contribution reaches the frontline. Charities that can reduce their administrative cost base through AI have a compelling story to tell funders and supporters - less on process, more on impact. That is a governance and communications argument as much as a finance one.

What Trustees Need to Know

The Charity Commission is clear: trustees remain responsible for decision-making and must not delegate critical financial judgements to AI or rely solely on AI-generated content without independent verification. AI supports the finance function. It does not replace it. Human oversight, particularly at board level, remains non-negotiable.

The Takeaway

Ask your finance lead one question: where does manual process consume the most time each month? That is your starting point for AI. The goal isn't automation for its own sake - it's freeing up financial expertise for the decisions that require it.

Sources: Rathbones Charity Insights; Charity Commission; Insightful AI This is Part 4 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

Your Donors, Understood - Using Automation to Deepen Relationships.

Fundraising is built on relationships. That will never change. But the intelligence behind those relationships - knowing who to contact, when, with what message - is exactly where AI earns its place.

The Numbers Have Shifted

AI usage in UK fundraising has surged from 57% in 2024 to 77% in 2025, with 70% of nonprofit professionals feeling positive about it. Most are using it for content creation - drafting newsletters, social media posts, and reports. That's a solid start. But it's only the surface.

Where the Real Opportunity Lies

Only 11% of charities are using AI for the genuinely powerful applications - predicting donor behaviour and prospect research. The crucial insight: organisations getting the most value from AI are not the most tech-savvy. They are the ones with clean, well-organised data.

This is a key point for senior leaders. Before you invest in AI fundraising tools, invest in your data. A well-organised CRM is the foundation everything else is built on. Once the data foundation is solid, AI can identify which donors are most likely to give, flag lapsing supporters before they disengage, suggest optimal contact timing, and personalise outreach at scale.

A Real-World Example

The National Deaf Children's Society has explored the use of chatbot-style tools to provide accessible, on-demand information for parents and carers. This reflects a wider trend across the sector, where charities are using AI to improve access to information and reduce administrative pressure on support teams—while keeping human relationships central.

The Line That Must Hold

Charities must adopt clear AI guidelines that prioritise human relationships, ensure human oversight remains central to decision-making, and continuously assess whether AI is genuinely enhancing donor experience - not just automating it. Major donors, long-term supporters, and anyone in a vulnerable situation should always be managed by people. AI identifies and prepares. Humans connect and convert.

The Takeaway

The charities raising more in 2025 are not necessarily the largest. They are the most intentional - using data and AI to make every conversation count, while keeping the human at the centre of every relationship.

Sources: Blackbaud Status of UK Fundraising 2025; DonorCloud; Civil Society This is Part 5 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

The Ethical Ledger - Getting AI Right in a Values-Led Organisation.

Charities operate on trust. It is the currency of every donor relationship, every beneficiary interaction, every funder conversation. That makes the ethics of AI not just a compliance question - it is a mission-critical one.

The Concern Is Legitimate

59% of charities express concerns about AI - specifically around data privacy, factual accuracy, and the risk of bias and discrimination. These concerns are well-founded and deserve a serious response, not reassurance. The Charity Commission is explicit: risks increase when AI is used directly in charity operations, particularly around data security, GDPR compliance, and wider legal obligations. Some AI tools handle data in less secure ways than others.

Four Questions Every Leader Should Be Able to Answer

Before deploying any AI tool, your leadership team should be able to answer: What data does this tool process? Where is that data stored? Who has access to it? And what happens if something goes wrong? If you cannot answer these questions, you are not ready to deploy the tool.

Building a Simple AI Policy

The NCVO advised in 2025 that charities should 'enable responsible use rather than prohibit all use.' A clear policy specifying which tools are approved, what data can and cannot be input, and what review processes apply is far more effective than a blanket ban.

The proportion of charities developing an AI policy tripled in a single year - from 16% to 48%. Having a clear policy helps staff feel more confident about using AI tools appropriately. A good policy doesn't need to be lengthy. It needs to be clear, proportionate, and reviewed annually.

Transparency With Your Stakeholders

Leading charities are committing to transparency - being clear where AI plays a meaningful role in creating or delivering content, and ensuring AI supports rather than replaces human judgement and compassion. Your donors and beneficiaries deserve to know how their data is being used. Proactive transparency builds trust. Reactive disclosure after an incident destroys it.

The Takeaway

Ethical AI is not about slowing down adoption. It is about adopting in a way you can stand behind - in front of your board, your funders, and the communities you serve. Get the policy right, and everything else becomes easier.

Sources: Charity Commission; NCVO; Charity Digital Skills Report 2025; Action for Happiness AI Policy

This is Part 6 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

From Pilot to Policy - Taking Your First AI Project Organisation-Wide.

Most charity AI projects start the same way — one enthusiastic team member, one tool, one use case. That's not a problem. That's exactly how it should begin. The question is what happens next.

The Gap Between Experimenting and Embedding

Only 11% of charities have implemented AI organisation-wide, and just 5% are actively building the structures needed to sustain it — AI policy, data governance, defined ownership. The majority are stuck in informal, individual use with no shared approach, no oversight, and no way to build on what's working. Moving from pilot to policy requires four things: evidence, ownership, infrastructure, and board confidence.

Build the Evidence First

Your pilot exists to answer one question: did this save time, improve quality, or increase impact — measurably? Before you scale anything, document what worked, what didn't, and what you would do differently. Concrete evidence is what converts a sceptical trustee into a champion.

Assign Ownership

One of the biggest barriers to scaling AI in charities is that it isn't anyone's job. Digital teams are already overstretched, and without clear ownership, AI initiatives stall. This doesn't require a new hire. It requires a named individual with protected time — someone responsible for maintaining the policy, reviewing tools, and reporting to the board.

Build The Infrastructure

Infrastructure means three things in practice: governance, people, and technical foundations.

Governance is the non-negotiable starting point. Before any tool is rolled out, your organisation needs a named AI owner, an acceptable use policy with specific rules and real examples, a clear position on which tools are approved and for what purposes, and a defined pathway for reporting problems when they arise. Boards also need to have explicitly signed off on the organisation's AI risk appetite — not as a technology briefing, but as a governance decision.

People infrastructure comes next. Staff need to complete minimum training before they are given access — not a briefing, not a plan, but demonstrated understanding of what is and isn't permitted. Line managers need to be briefed separately; they are your primary enforcement layer. And there must be a mechanism for staff to raise confusion or flag misuse without it feeling like a disciplinary matter.

Technical infrastructure follows once governance and people foundations are in place. This means tools procured through a legitimate organisational process — not individual sign-ups — with vendor data processing agreements confirmed, a data classification framework that tells staff what can and cannot be entered into AI tools, and access controls that determine who uses what and how.

The failure pattern we see most often is organisations that reverse this sequence. A staff member discovers a tool, enthusiasm spreads, and governance gets retrofitted after the fact — if at all. By that point, data has been handled inconsistently, habits have formed that are hard to break, and the organisation is carrying risk it never consciously accepted. The order matters. Governance is never last.

Getting the Board on Board

The 2025 refresh of the Charity Governance Code explicitly addressed AI and technology risk for the first time. Trustees need to understand what AI means for their organisation's risk profile, their data responsibilities, their staff, and their beneficiaries. Frame this as a governance conversation, not a technology briefing — because that is what it is.

The Takeaway

The charities that will lead on AI in three years are not the ones that moved fastest. They are the ones that built deliberately. The stakes of getting this wrong are real: data breaches, reputational damage, staff distrust, and beneficiaries let down by tools that were never properly governed. The stakes of getting it right are equally real — more impact, leaner operations, and an organisation genuinely equipped for what comes next. Scale what works. Document everything. Make someone responsible. Build in that order.

Sources: Charity Digital Skills Report 2025; Plinth AI Strategy Guide; William Joseph This is Part 7 of an 8-part guide on AI & Automation for Charities.

The Charity of Tomorrow, Built Today.

When you started this guide you were interested in one question When it comes to AI, Is your organisation moving with the moment, or watching from the sideline? This final part isn't a summary. It's an invitation to think bigger.

What the Leading Charities Will Look Like

The charities that thrive over the next five years will not necessarily be the largest or the best-funded. They will be the most intentional - about their data, their processes, their people, and their mission. They will use AI to reclaim hours from administration and reinvest them in frontline impact. Their fundraising teams will spend less time drafting and more time building relationships. Their finance functions will produce funder reports in hours, not weeks. Their leaders will make decisions informed by real-time data, not gut instinct alone. None of this is out of reach. Most of it is available now, at low or no cost, to any charity willing to start.

The Readiness Gap Is the Real Risk

The full benefit of AI for charities will not be realised for two to five years - not because the technology isn't ready, but because changing ways of working takes longer than implementing tools. That means the window to build readiness is now. Charities that start building their AI foundations today - clean data, clear policy, capable people - will have a significant advantage over those that wait for certainty before acting.

A Word on What Won't Change

AI will not replace the reason your charity exists. It will not replace the relationships at the heart of your work. It will not replace the judgement of experienced leaders, the compassion of frontline workers, or the trust of the communities you serve. What it will do - if used well - is give all of those things more room to breathe.

Where to Go From Here

If this guide has prompted action, your next step is not a strategy day or a new workstream. It is three things, done in order.

First, identify one manual process that consumes disproportionate time. Second, test one free AI tool against that process this month. Third, share what you find with your leadership team and agree one next step.

To help you track progress across all eight parts of this guide, use the AI Progress Checklist on the following page. Build it into an operational team meeting or an Away Day — not a board session. Execution sits with the people doing the work. The checklist moves at your pace, not a prescribed one.

Start small. Stay focused. Build from evidence. The charities that will lead on AI are not the ones with the biggest budgets or the boldest ambitions — they are the ones that started, learned, and kept going.

The charity of tomorrow is being built by the decisions you make today.

Sources: Charity Excellence Framework; Charity Digital Skills Report 2025

This is Part 8 - the final Part - of the guide AI & Automation for Charities.

Thank you for reading. If this guide has been useful, share it with a colleague who needs it.

About the Author.



Tayo R.

Tayo Richards is a proven transformation professional with over a decade of experience across change management, project/programme delivery, PMO consultancy, and finance for non-profits. As a tech-focused consultant, she is now firmly focused on AI and automation transformations - helping organisations understand what's possible, what's practical, and how to move forward with confidence.

She has worked on major transformations in = organisations including Unilever, Ocado, DP World, the Health Foundation, and the British Council.

Tayo helps organisations build the clarity, structure, and capability they need before they automate, scale, or transform. Her work sits at the intersection of people, process, and technology - which is exactly where AI decisions get made or get stuck.

She writes and speaks on AI readiness, automation, and what it really takes for mission-led organisations to adopt new ways of working with confidence.

You can hire Tayo to help with:

- AI readiness assessments and automation consulting
- Change management - strategy, delivery, and embedding
- PMO setup and advisory
- Finance for not-for-profits
- Training and workshops for teams navigating change
- Speaking and panel appearances on AI, transformation, and organisational readiness

If this guide is prompting questions about where your organisation stands - or where to start - Tayo would love to hear from you.

[**Click here to view Tayo's profile and start a chat!**](#)

Your AI Progress Checklist:

This checklist covers all eight parts of the guide. It is a progress tool, not a compliance document — you do not need to complete every item, and there is no fixed pace. Work through it in line with your organisation's capacity and priorities.

Build it into an operational team meeting or an Away Day rather than limiting it to board level. Define the strategic questions at trustee level if needed but let your operational teams lead the execution conversations. The people closest to the work will have the most useful answers.

Tick items off as they are completed. Return to it regularly. Use it to start conversations, not to close them.

Part 1 - The Mission Doesn't Change!

- We have had a leadership conversation about AI and what it means for our organisation
- We have identified where admin is getting in the way of our mission
- We have agreed that AI is worth exploring seriously, not just in passing
- We have shared this guide with at least one other senior leader or trustee
- We have set a date to revisit AI as a standing agenda item

Part 2 - What AI Actually Does

- We can clearly describe the difference between AI and automation to our team
- We have identified at least one admin task AI could support right now
- We have discussed what AI should NOT do in our organisation
- We have identified one area of service delivery where AI could improve accessibility
- We have shared the case for AI with our finance lead or trustee board
- We have agreed that the goal is freeing people up, not replacing them

Part 3 - Free and Low-Cost Tools

- We have checked what AI features are already available in Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace
- We have registered or checked eligibility with TechSoup UK
- We have tested at least one free AI tool against a real task
- We have evaluated whether the tool saves time and produces usable output

- We have confirmed the tool is appropriate for use with our data
- We have shared findings with our team and agreed a next step

Part 4 - Smarter Financial Decisions

- We have mapped where manual finance processes consume the most time
- We have explored whether our accounting software has AI features we are not using
- We have discussed AI's role in funder reporting with our finance lead
- We have considered how reducing admin costs strengthens our donor transparency narrative
- We have confirmed that trustees understand AI does not replace their decision-making responsibility
- We have identified one finance process to pilot AI support on

Part 5 - Deepening Donor Relationships

- We have assessed the quality and cleanliness of our donor data
- We have identified which donor segments would benefit most from more personalised communication
- We have explored whether our CRM has AI or automation features available
- We have identified at least one repetitive donor communication we could automate
- We have agreed clear boundaries - which donor relationships must always be managed by people
- We have discussed how AI can support prospect research without replacing relationship-building
- We have a plan to review whether AI is genuinely improving donor experience

Part 6 - The Ethical Ledger

- We can answer: what data does each AI tool we use process, and where is it stored?
- We have checked that our AI tool usage is GDPR-compliant
- We have drafted or adopted a simple AI policy
- Our AI policy has been reviewed and approved by a trustee or senior leader
- We have communicated our AI policy to all relevant staff and volunteers
- We have committed to transparency with donors and beneficiaries about how we use AI

- We have scheduled an annual review of our AI policy
- We have identified who is responsible for AI governance in our organisation

Part 7 - From Pilot to Policy

- We have completed at least one AI pilot and documented what we learned
- We have a named individual responsible for overseeing AI in our organisation
- We have a basic staff training plan covering what is and is not permitted
- We have conducted a data audit confirming our tools are GDPR-compliant
- We have presented an AI update to our trustee board
- We have a clear process for evaluating and approving new AI tools
- We have identified what we will scale, based on evidence from our pilot

Part 8 - The Charity of Tomorrow

- We have a shared leadership vision for how AI will support our mission over the next 3 years
- We have clean, well-organised data as a foundation for future AI use
- We have a clear AI policy, a named owner, and a review cycle in place
- We have trained our team on responsible AI use
- We have moved at least one process from manual to AI-supported
- We have evidence of time saved or impact improved through AI
- We are ready to build on what we have started - and to share what we have learned



Need support working through this checklist? Tayo R offers AI readiness assessments, workshops, and advisory support for charity leaders and finance teams. [Get in touch via her Blume profile.](#)

