

INSPIRING SCOTLAND

Funded Charities AI Survey Report

28 May 2025



Introduction & Key Findings

‘AI is unavoidable, not inevitable’, is a sentiment borne out by Inspiring Scotland’s recent voluntary survey of its funded charities. And with 102 charities responding - approx. one third of those invited - it is clear there is growing interest in AI and the opportunities and challenges it presents for the third sector.

The online survey was undertaken between 9th April and 2nd May 2025. The full results are set out below.

The headline messages are:

- Most charities have a **strong belief in the relevance and potential benefits of AI for themselves and our sector.**
- A majority of charities have an **equally strong sense that they are not prepared or equipped to realise these benefits.**
- The key drivers of this lack of readiness are **insufficient resources (staff and financial) but also an understanding of where to start.**
- A significant minority voiced **concerns about data security and ethical issues, especially environmental impacts. For some, these are a material barrier to engaging with AI.**

It is notable that the results of our survey display a high degree of similarity to those of the [2024 Charity Digital Skills Report](#) on which our survey was based.

The response to our survey surpassed our expectations. From the survey 59 charities indicated they wished to participate in our summer 2025 AI Pilot. This tells us there is significant demand for learning and real-world support.

Next Steps

In response to the survey results Inspiring Scotland is putting together an insights and support programme that will:

- **Inform charities about business support opportunities and upcoming learning sessions** from SCVO, Scottish AI Alliance, CEIS and others.
- **Identify and share research reports and other insights that are relevant for the third sector.**
- **Identify and point charities to ‘short’ and/or online training courses** offered through organisations such as [Data Lab](#), [Just Enterprise](#) and potentially, higher education institutes.
- **Identify, engage and share advice** on funders and funding streams with a focus on tech/AI solutions.
- **Give charities the opportunity to participate in an ‘AI Community of Practice’** currently being developed by SCVO. This will convene online every six weeks to share practical experiences and learn together.

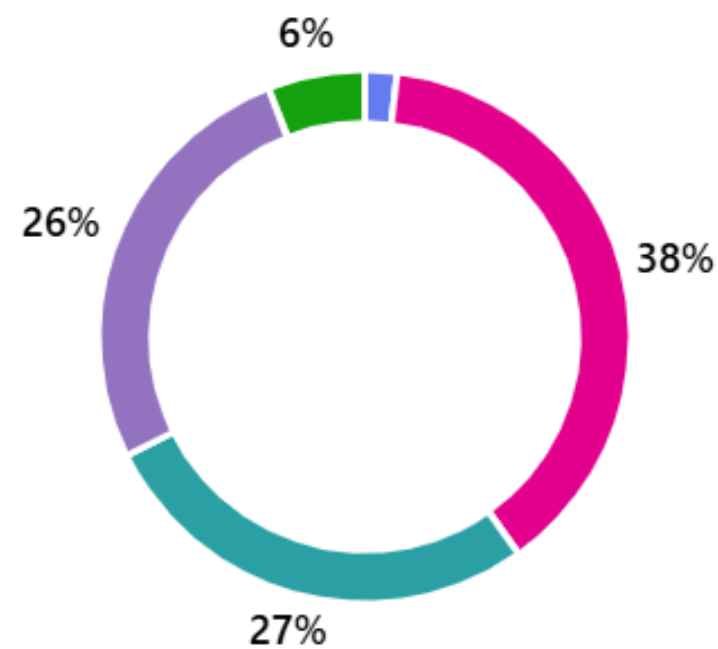
Also, our own AI Pilot will commence in early June. With our partner CEIS, this will work with four charities to identify common operational inefficiencies and develop, test and implement AI solutions in a real-world environment. We will continuously share learning from this experience as well as an analysis of the impact of the work.

Our aim is to help as many charities as possible to start/advance their AI journey in a way that works for them and if it's right, help them embrace technology that is increasingly understood to be unavoidable. This forms another key element in our continuing focus on adding value to the organisations and people we fund and work with.

2. How would you rate your organisation's skills to engage with AI?

Excellent	2
Fair	39
Poor	28
We don't do this	27
I don't know	6

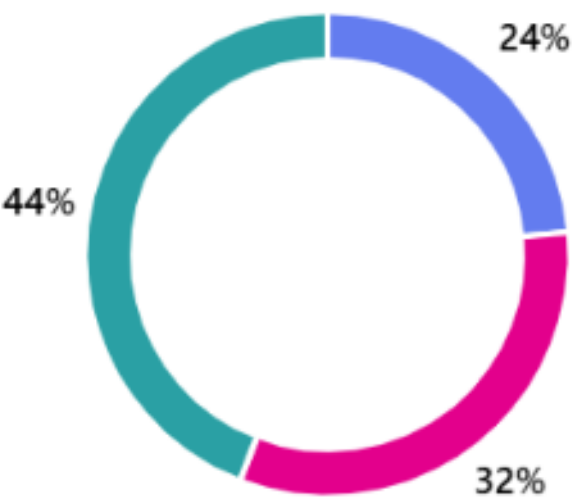
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3. Are you currently using AI in day to day work?

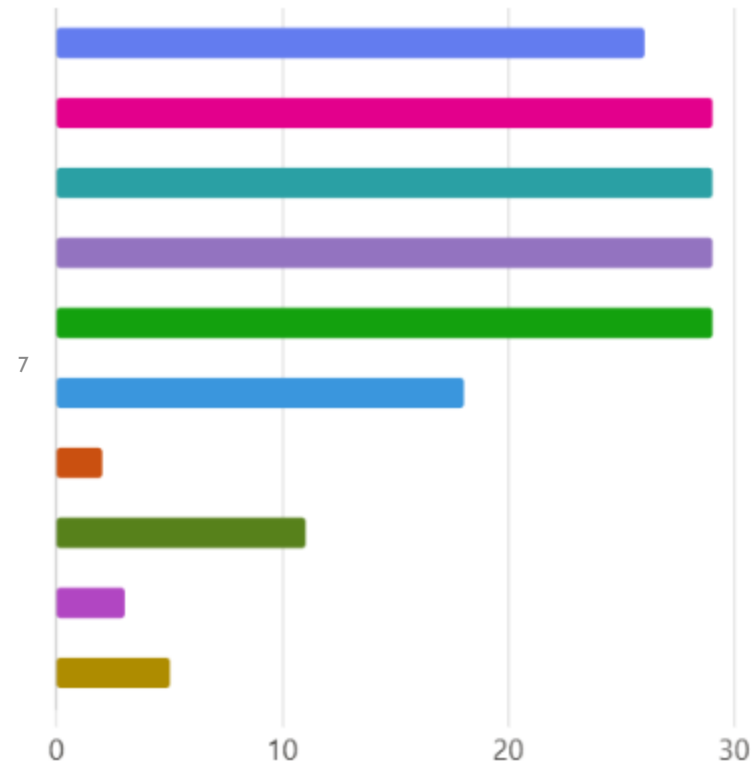
● Yes I am	24
● Informally (e.g. trying out AI tools)	33
● No	45
● Not sure	0

6



4. What are you using AI tools for?

Developing online content (e.g. social media posts and generating images)	26
Administrative tasks such as summarising meeting notes	29
Drafting documents and reports	29
Generate ideas/creativity	29
Research and information gathering (e.g. about a topic, current advice)	29
Grant fundraising	18
Service delivery	2
Finding numerical insights in data	11
Supporting others with AI and influencing	3
Other	5

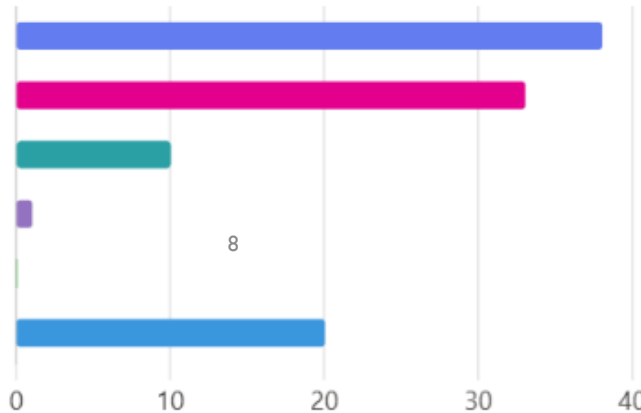


Relevance to Organisation

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5. Do you agree: "AI developments are relevant to your organisation (e.g. AI tools, public use, policies, legislation)"

Strongly agree	38
Agree	33
Neither	10
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0
I don't know	20



"We can see that there are likely to be benefits to engaging with AI. As a funded organisation we have an obligation to be efficient and find ways to improve our services and reduce our costs."

"We are keen to understand how AI can improve our capacity and what more it can do. However, we are unclear as to the impact on privacy e.g. when using the likes of Read.AI for capturing meeting notes. With use becoming wider we also need to develop a policy and guidelines on use setting parameters but unsure where to start."

Preparedness to Opps/Challenges

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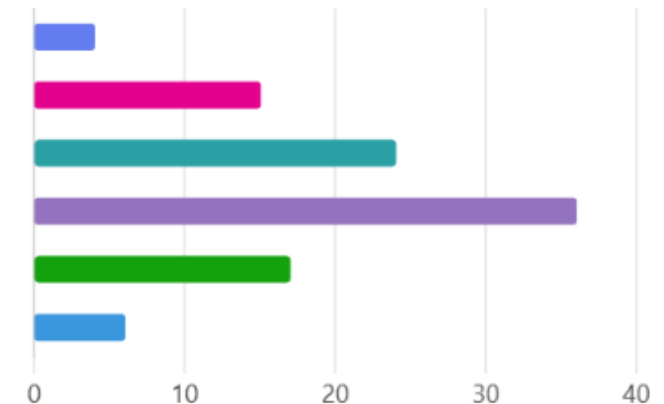
“AI is moving at such a rapid pace that it feels difficult to use it with confidence.

We're aware some staff are using it but are concerned that we've not fully considered the ethical and environmental challenges.”

“The climate is so challenging at present we are focussed on sustainability and securing income. With being so lean on resources, we have little/no resources available to properly research, test and explore this on our behalf. We also lack internal digital skills and would require additional support to do so.”

7. Do you agree: "We feel prepared to respond to the opportunities and challenges surrounding AI technology"

Strongly agree	4
Agree	15
Neither	24
Disagree	36
Strongly Disagree	17
I don't know	6



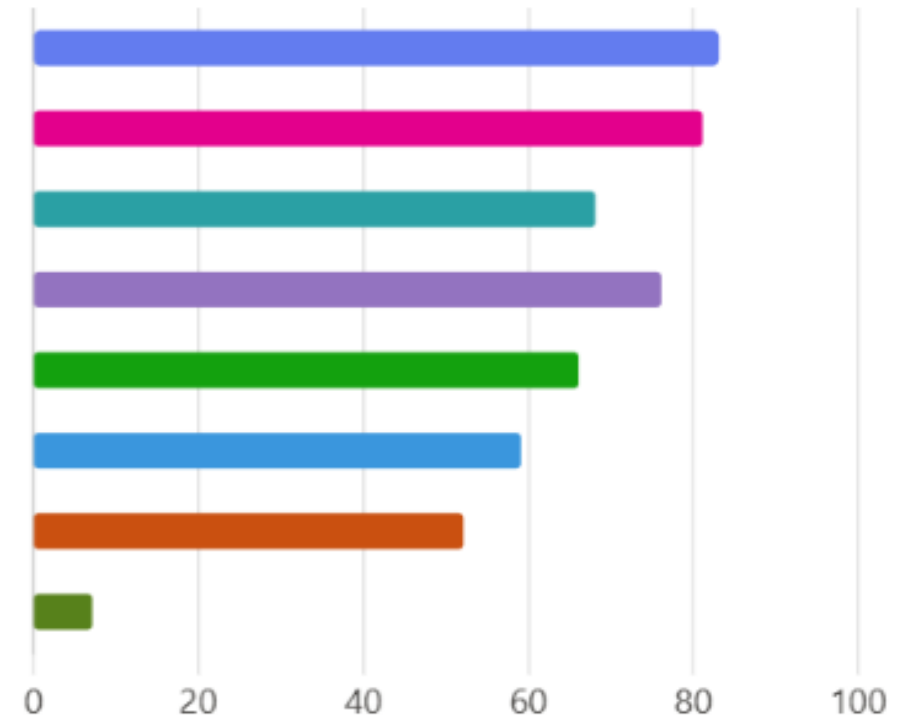
Skills/Knowledge to Develop

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9. What areas of skills or knowledge are you looking to develop?

● General understanding of AI and how charities are using it?	83
● Practical knowledge of how to use AI tools responsibly	81
● Exploring potential use cases for AI in our services	68
● Assessing AI risks (bias, safeguarding and using AI tools responsibly)	76
● How to use AI tools with data	66
● Insights (e.g. how our target group is using or affected by AI, the impact on our sector)	59
● Discussing our approach and challenges openly with other nonprofits	52
● Other	7

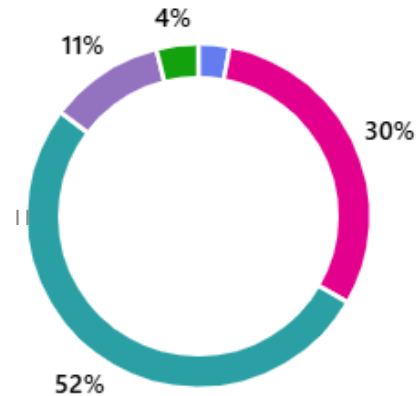
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Alignment with Values

10. "I am confident that AI implementations align with my organisation's values."

Strongly agree	3
Agree	31
Neither	53
Disagree	11
Strongly disagree	4



“...there is some reluctance and reservations across our staff team - primarily around perceived threats to their roles - which we need to consider to ensure full alignment.”

“AI implementations can only align with our organisational values if we understand how to use it properly and responsibly and are always guided and mindful of our values.”

I am concerned about the environmental impact and I am sure there are other downsides I have not learned about as of yet.”

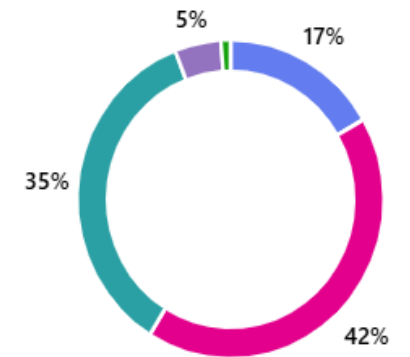
“I am not sure if it would as I fear many organisations would see it as a means of 'keeping ahead of the competition' and those organisations that don't embrace AI and technology will be left behind.

With limited funding, I can appreciate why organisations think this way. But if only they would work together and pool resources, they could make the funding they have go so much further and fill many of the gaps they have with AI. Through collaboration, they can spread the risk and cost of initiatives, while drawing on the knowledge, ideas and experience of others.

I have always believed strongly in collaboration and even sharing anything developed in-house with others, but unfortunately not many others do. Perhaps some sort of 'collective' of organisations that believe in collaboration could show the others that this approach can benefit not only all organisations, but more importantly the clients they serve.”

12. "I believe that new technologies will enhance collaboration within the third sector

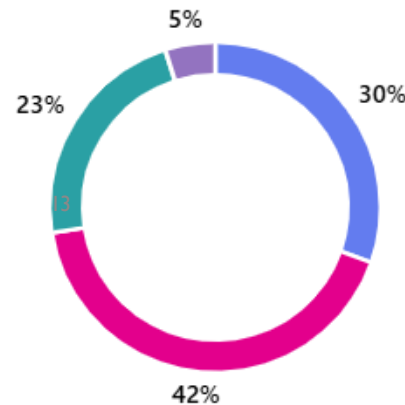
Strongly agree	17
Agree	43
Neither	36
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	1



Potential Benefits

14. "I am excited about the potential benefits that new technologies (e.g., AI, automation) can bring to our workplace."

Strongly agree	31
Agree	43
Neither	23
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0



“Cautiously excited but nervous and worried.”

“I don't think I know anywhere near enough to understand the potential benefits this new technology can bring but from what I hear on the grapevine it sounds like it'll make a positive difference. My excitement is tempered by the comments made above around resources for implementing these developments not being as available as needed.”

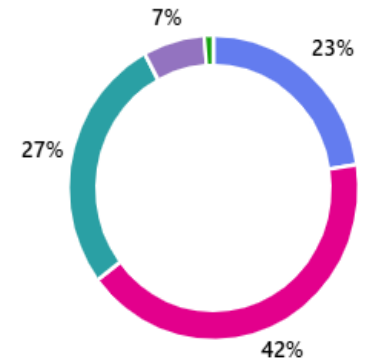
“Anything that allows us to save time that can be spent improving outcomes with people can only be a good thing, however we need to ensure the downsides (e.g. environmental impact , privacy and bias) are addressed.”

"I'm already aware of other agencies using AI to help them with report writing, funding applications etc to speed up the process, to generate images for use in publicity, to aid in social media content generation and more. There are a range of areas where I can see the benefit and likely many more which have not yet been identified. Would be amazing to use AI to analyse data and produce summaries on trends rather than having to pour through and do this manually."

"I use it a lot for reducing paragraphs in line with word counts in funding applications, a task which used to take up my time and now doesn't."

16. "I feel that new technologies will reduce the repetitive tasks in my job."

Strongly agree	23
Agree	43
Neither	28
Disagree	7
Strongly disagree	1

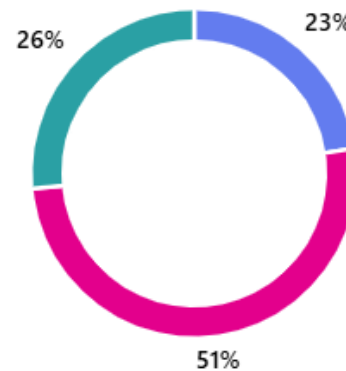


AI: Make Processes Efficient

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18. "I think that new digital tools will make work processes more efficient."

● Strongly agree	23
● Agree	52
● Neither	27
● Disagree	0
● Strongly disagree	0



"I am already seeing this in relation to updating our policies, procedures and SOPs."

"I believe this to be true but only if supported by effective training and proper use. I would imagine that AI is like any other technology in that what you get out is only as good as what you put in.."

"With a reduced workforce due to restructure AI could assist with admin tasks and free up team members to change perspective when working and teamworking. It can also enable more creative brainstorming and bigger thinking as well as potentially breaking down resistance to starting things, taking different approaches and perspectives, and hopefully be a significant part of enabling and empowering the beneficiaries of our work. Also if we don't adopt it into our work in an ethical way now we could be left behind."

*“We have been **investigating the use of AI tools and have attended training sessions to further develop our knowledge**. We're aware that staff are using tools like ChatGPT to assist their work, but without a solid understanding of the benefits and risks, we aren't able to implement an AI strategy or policy.*

At the moment, I feel like third sector organisations that are using AI, and using it well, aren't promoting it due to fear of pushback from service users and funders. However, that it's a long-term solution. We need open and honest conversations about AI and its use. It has the potential to change what we do and how we do it, and we need to be part of the journey before it overtakes us.”

*“We are excited about what AI can bring to the table and intrigued as to how it will **disrupt ways of working** - would be helpful to be able to understand and anticipate more.”*

*“I'm **very nervous of AI** but want to learn more about it. It has a huge carbon footprint which worries me. I think there is a danger that the uniqueness of the third sector could be damaged by AI.”*

Other Comments

“I am conscious that along with all the benefits of AI, we need to have a good understanding of how this can support but not replace our work. What we do is about people, and we are a unique service which we want to keep the USP alive in comms and documents and so we will never be fully automated, but I would like to understand how we can use this better and for all of our team of 34 to be confident in their use of AI appropriately. I am also keen to understand how AI fits into our organisational risk register.”

“Its great to see this survey come up as there has been a wider acknowledgement in the 3rd sector on the use of AI but it all seems very fragmented without much guidance. So any input would be very useful.”

“Feel that we are being left behind and struggling to keep up with AI due to the current climate. Spending all our time on working to secure the appropriate funds and focussing on retaining staff - challenging given the financial uncertainty of the sector. Would love to be at the forefront and embracing transformation using AI just not sure where to start and worried about risk.”

“I think that this is an exciting time for developing our understanding and use of ai but like so many other technology it is out of our financial reach at this time.”

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