Chartered Institute of Fundraising
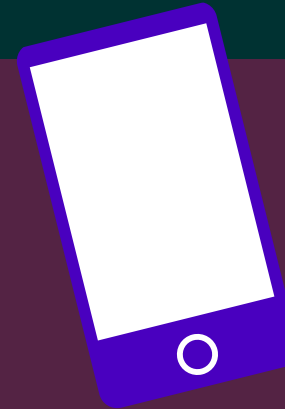
UNIVERSITY *of York*

SUMMARY

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF FUNDRAISING WITH AI

INTRODUCTION

In this report, we explore the opportunities and challenges fundraisers face when thinking about and/or using AI-driven technologies, how known issues and risks (e.g. amplification of harmful biases) manifest in the context of fundraising, and the role that guidelines and regulations must play in a highly unregulated sector.

AI-driven technologies are offering novel and even more compelling possibilities for nonprofit fundraising than pre-AI digital tools: data science applications provide a deeper understanding of audiences and donors, and generative methods can create highly personalised and persuasive communications. But the realisation of potential positive impacts for an AI-powered fundraising sector requires understanding and developing approaches that support responsible adoption of new technologies.
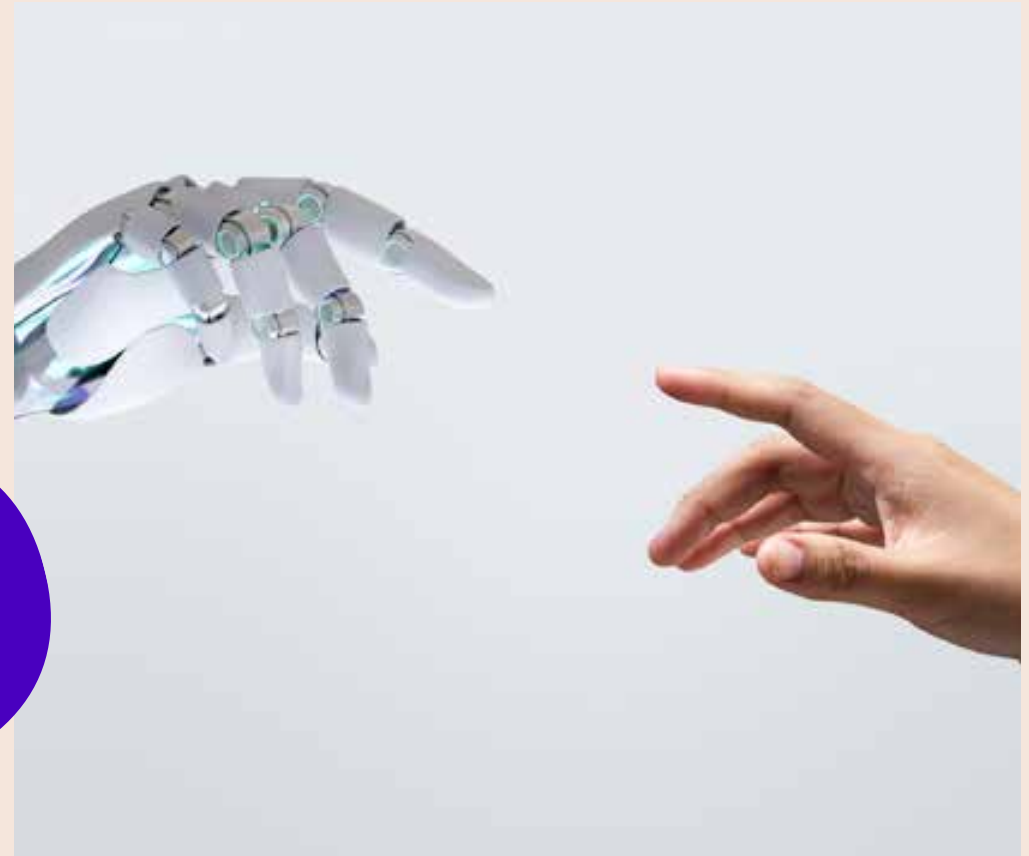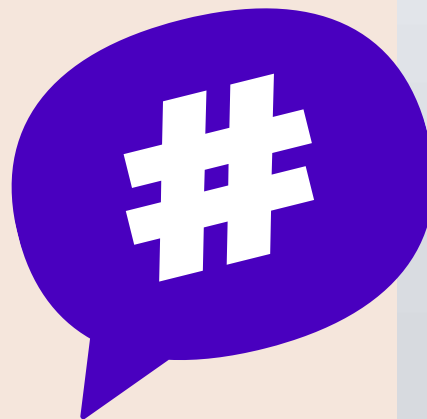
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Key research findings at a glance

Our online survey was completed by 79 fundraisers (most respondents were employed fundraisers, and some had recently taken on a consultancy role) between October 2024 and February 2025, covering all areas of AI as it is used for fundraising: mapping out understanding and knowledge of AI, skills and training, level of implementation of AI at organisational and departmental levels, opportunities offered by the use of AI, challenges and barriers to adoption, and knowledge of guidelines and policy frameworks to support the profession.

1 Almost half of the respondents (47%) use AI for fundraising purposes, with 53% replying they do not use AI. Even though this may initially seem that AI is making significant inroads into the everyday work practices of fundraising professionals, the sector's outlook is more nuanced and complex.

2 Over three quarters of respondents (78%) see AI as an opportunity to be more efficient and reduce costs. This was followed by 76% citing using it to communicate more efficiently, while understanding audiences better was chosen by over half of the respondents (62%). The use of Chat GPT to liaise with supporters was the least mentioned opportunity (9%).

3 Only 11% of charities who use AI for fundraising purposes spend over £10,000 a year on it, and the majority (37%) spend under £1,000. However, a significant number of respondents who use AI (31%) don't know how much money their organisation spends. Larger charities (those with more than 25 fundraising staff) that use AI tend to spend more money on AI than smaller charities (those with fewer than 10 fundraising staff).

4 76% of all respondents feel they lack knowledge about AI, with only a 1% difference in people who do (76%) and don't (75%) use AI. 78% of those who don't use AI reported a lack of practical AI skills within their organisation, although this figure fell slightly, to 67%, for those respondents who use AI for fundraising, it is nevertheless high.

5 Overwhelmingly, ethical concerns – which in our survey included cybersecurity risks, privacy and data breaches – are the highest reported barrier when using AI for fundraising. There is very slight variation between those who use AI (84%), compared to those respondents who do not use AI (73%).

6 Only 4% of respondents report being 'very familiar' with regulation policies around the use of AI (rising to just 9% of those who already use AI), whilst 90% are unaware of any sector specific guidelines to support fundraisers.

PART 1. THE RESPONDENTS
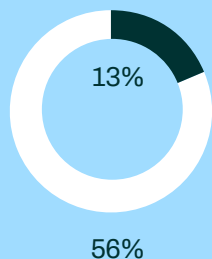## Key statistics

31%

We received responses from **all nonprofit and charity sub sectors**. However, the **education** sector is by far the most well represented sector with **31% of respondents** – this is likely due to the personal networks within the sector used to publicise the survey

Over half of respondents (56%) work for charities or nonprofit organisations that **operate in just one region of the UK** with Yorkshire and Humber being the most well represented region (13% of all respondents)

13%

56%

17%
of respondents

Health charities are the second most common sector representing **17% of respondents**. Arts, heritage and research are the next cluster of nonprofits with the highest levels of representation in the sample, ranging between **5% to 6%**

51% of respondents work for an organisation with fewer than 10 fundraising staff. For those who work with larger fundraising teams (over 25 staff) there was wide variation in the number of staff, the majority between 30 and 100

27% of respondents work for organisations that **operate throughout the UK**
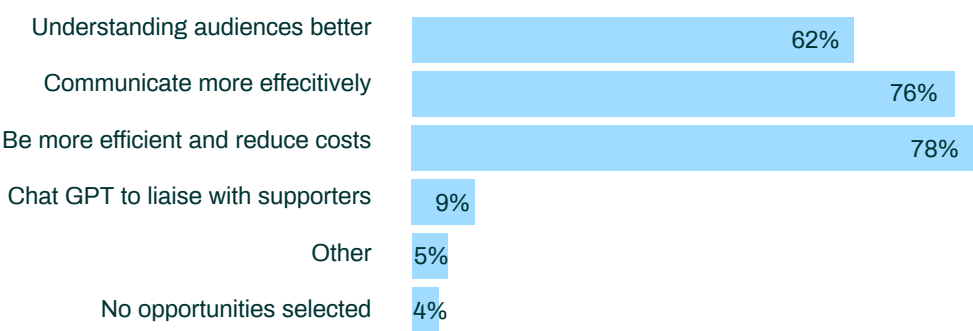
PART 2. OPPORTUNITIES AND USES OF AI IN FUNDRAISING

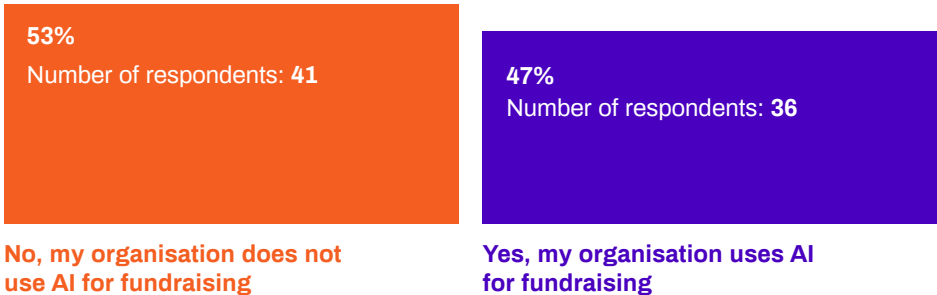**Note: All data in the following charts is expressed in number of respondents, unless cited as a percentage %**

What sort of opportunities do you associate with the use of AI for fundraising?

Opportunities associated with the use of AI for fundraising

Opportunity	%
Understanding audiences better	62%
Communicate more effectively	76%
Be more efficient and reduce costs	78%
Chat GPT to liaise with supporters	9%
Other	5%
No opportunities selected	4%

Number of respondents who are currently using AI

Is your organisation currently using AI for fundraising?

53%
Number of respondents: **41**
No, my organisation does not use AI for fundraising

47%
Number of respondents: **36**
Yes, my organisation uses AI for fundraising

Opportunities associated with AI in fundraising across charity sectors

Opportunities associated with the use of AI for fundraising across charity sectors

	Understanding Audiences	Communicate better	Efficiency	Chat GPT
Animals		1	1	
Armed forces	2	1	2	1
Arts	3	3	4	
Beneficiary group	1	1	2	
Charity and CVS support			1	
Childcare	1	1	1	
Crime and Justice	1	1	1	
Education	13	18	17	
Environment	1	2	2	
Health	9	12	9	3
Heritage	3	2	2	1
Leisure	1	1	1	
Other	2	3	4	1
Professions	1	1	2	
Religion	1	1	1	
Research	3	4	4	1
Saving of lives	2	2	1	
Social care	3	3	3	
Social welfare	1	2	2	
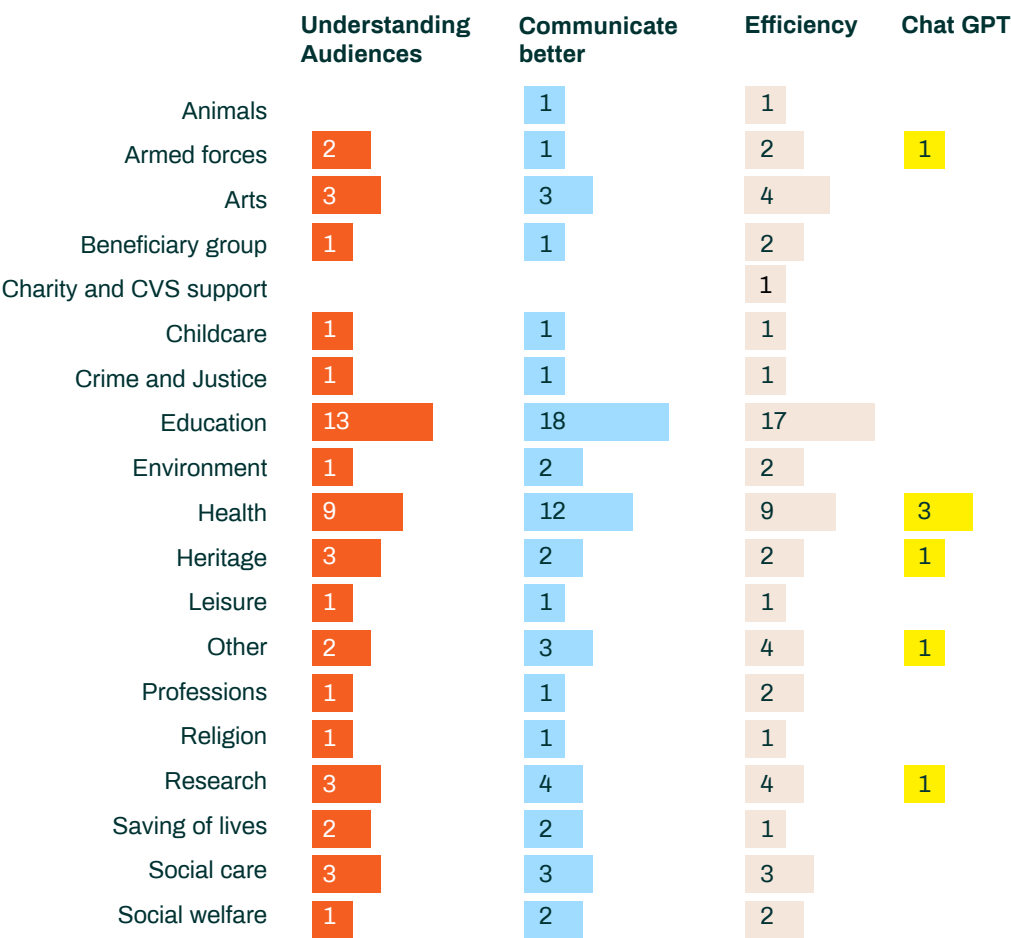
Uses of AI across different charity sectors

Does not use AI

Uses AI
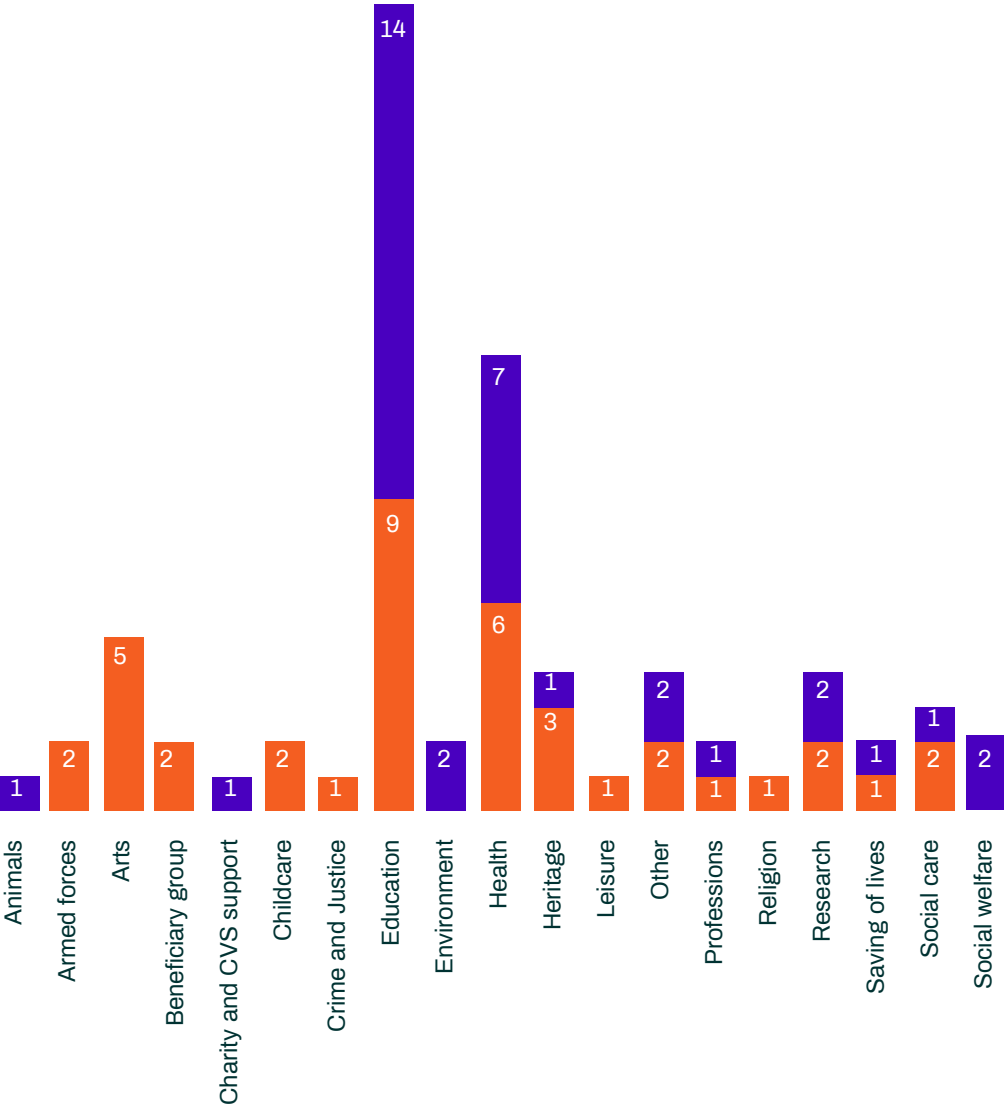
How much does your organisation spend on AI?

- Under 10 fundraising staff
- 11–25 fundraising staff
- Over 25 fundraising staff

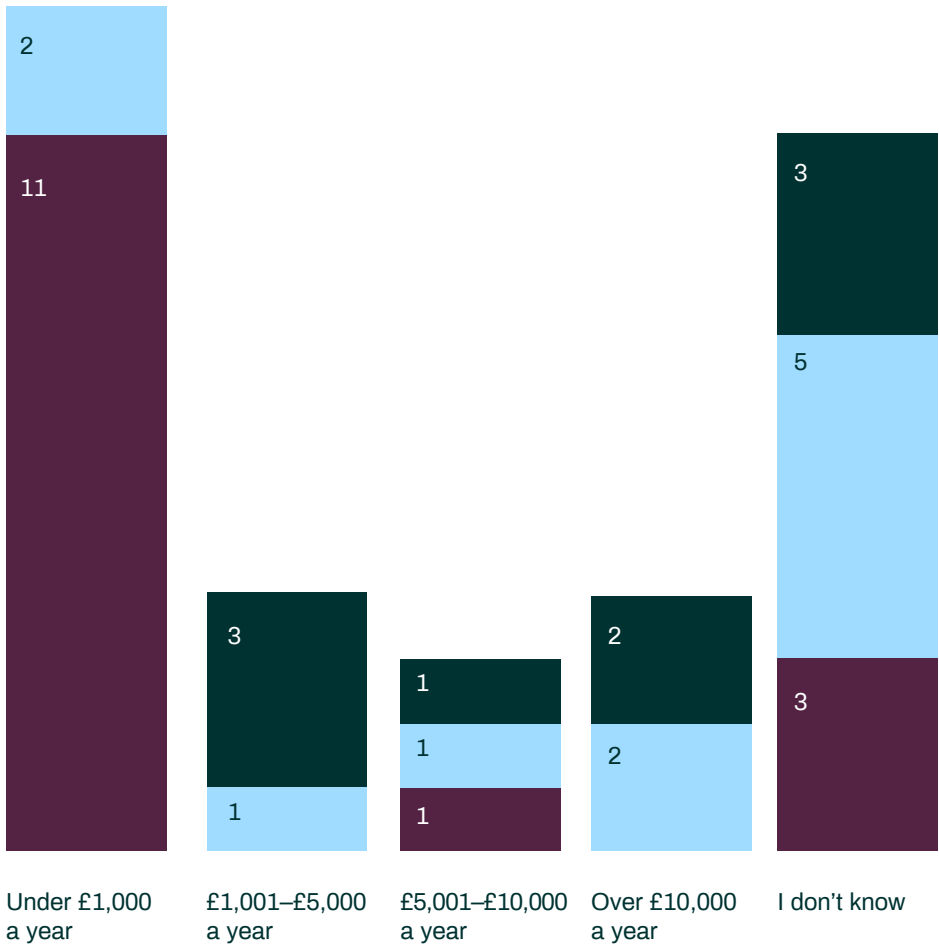# Part 3. CONCERNS, BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES OF USING AI FOR FUNDRAISING

Spending on AI in fundraising compared to spending on digital fundraising tools

Opportunities associated with the use of AI for fundraising

Does not use AI

Uses AI

	Over £25,000	£10,001 – £25,000	£5,001 – £10,000	£1,000 – £5,000	Under £1,000	I don't know
Does not use AI	8	6	2	6	2	17
Uses AI	12	4	5	6	1	8

Use of digital tools in fundraising: a comparison between AI users and non-users

Use of digital tools in fundraising: a comparison between AI users and non-users

Skill level	Does not use AI	Uses AI
5 – We are experts and up to date in the use of digital tools for our fundraising	0%	100%
4 – We are extremely confident in our ability	50%	50%
3 – The majority of us are comfortable with digital tools	41%	59%
2 – Some of us have some experience, but we are a minority	57%	43%
1 – We have some basic knowledge of using digital tools	86%	14%
0 – We do not use digital tools and would not be confident doing so	100%	0%
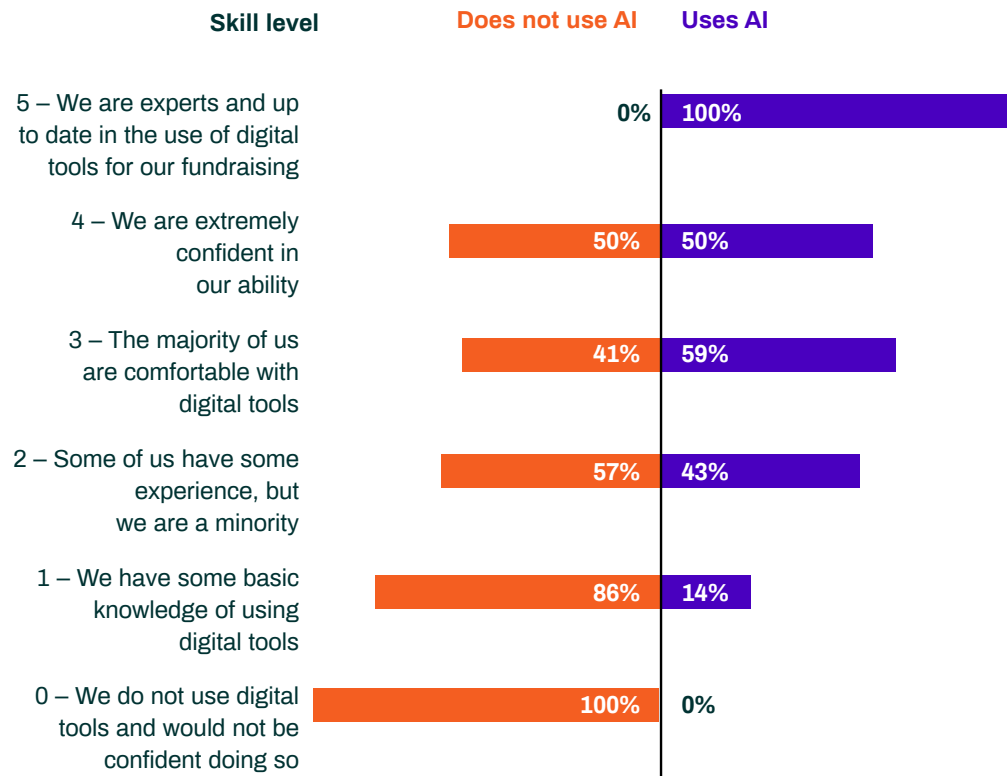
Perceived risks in the use of AI for fundraising for those who use AI compared to those who don't

Does not use AI   **Uses AI**

% perceive as risk

Data bias and discrimination: Does not use AI **51%**, Uses AI **72%**

Staff redundancies: Does not use AI **17%**, Uses AI **6%**

Ethical concerns: cybersecurity risks, privacy & data breaches: Does not use AI **73%**, Uses AI **84%**

Environmental impact of AI: Does not use AI **32%**, Uses AI **47%**

Lack of transparency and accountability: Does not use AI **41%**, Uses AI **47%**

Keeping pace with legal and regulatory requirements: Does not use AI **59%**, Uses AI **69%**

Other: Does not use AI **20%**, Uses AI **6%**

What are the main barriers to using AI?

Does not use AI   **Uses AI**   **% see as barrier**

Lack of knowledge of AI: Does not use AI **78%**, Uses AI **75%**

Reduced finances: Does not use AI **22%**, Uses AI **11%**

Lack of practical skills within the organisation: Does not use AI **78%**, Uses AI **67%**

Too concerned about its negative impact on fundraising: Does not use AI **15%**, Uses AI **33%**

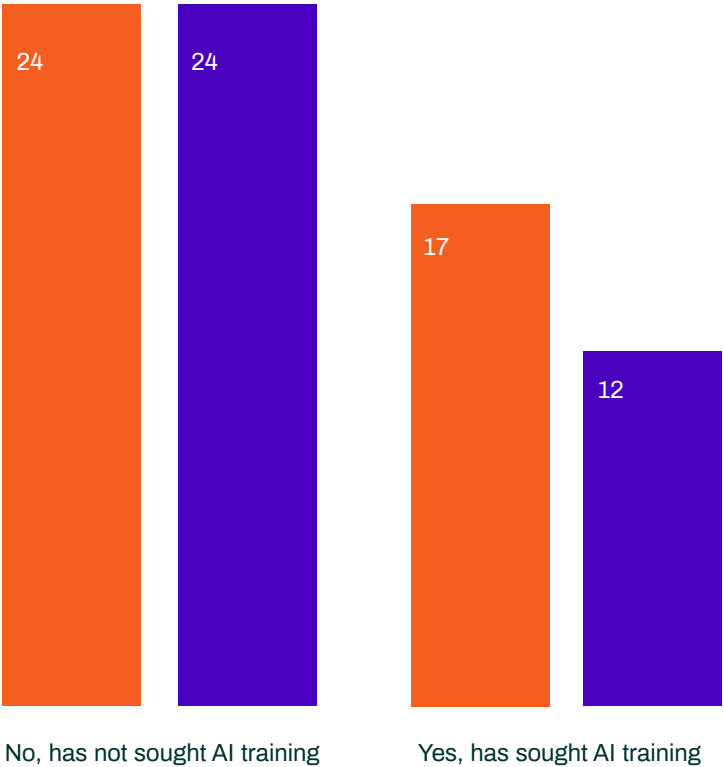Other: Does not use AI **7%**, Uses AI **17%**
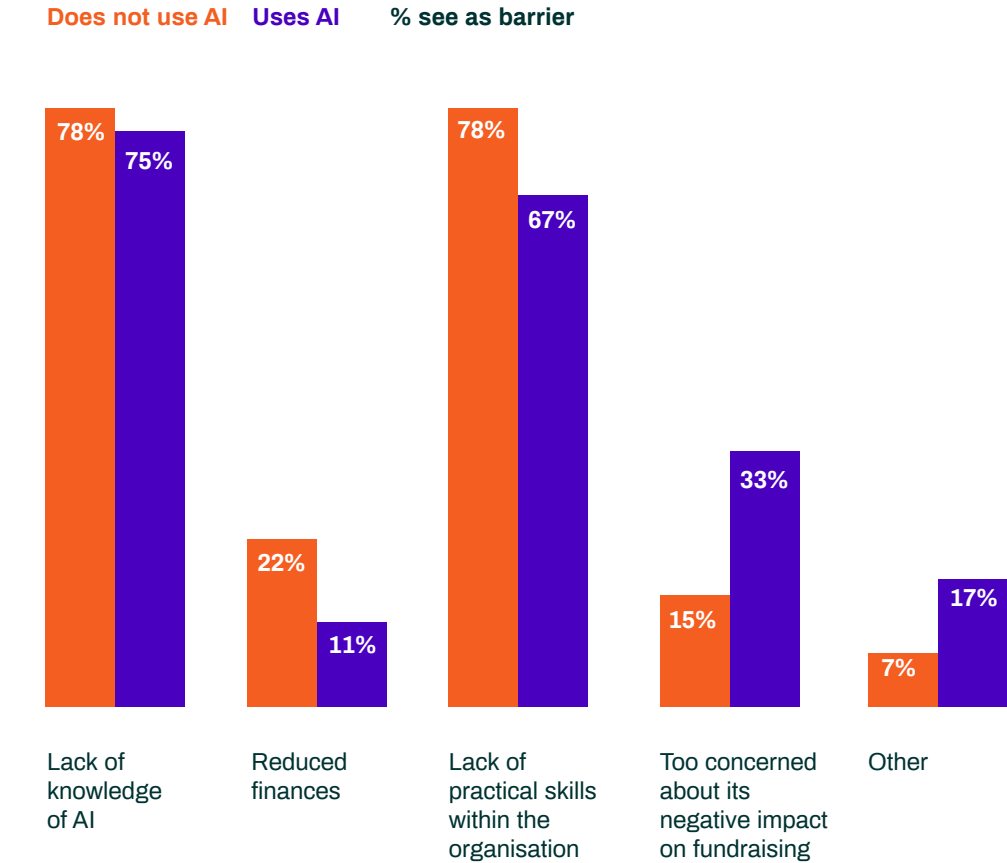
PART 4. AI TRAINING AND INFORMATION; REGULATION AND POLICY

AI training over the last year

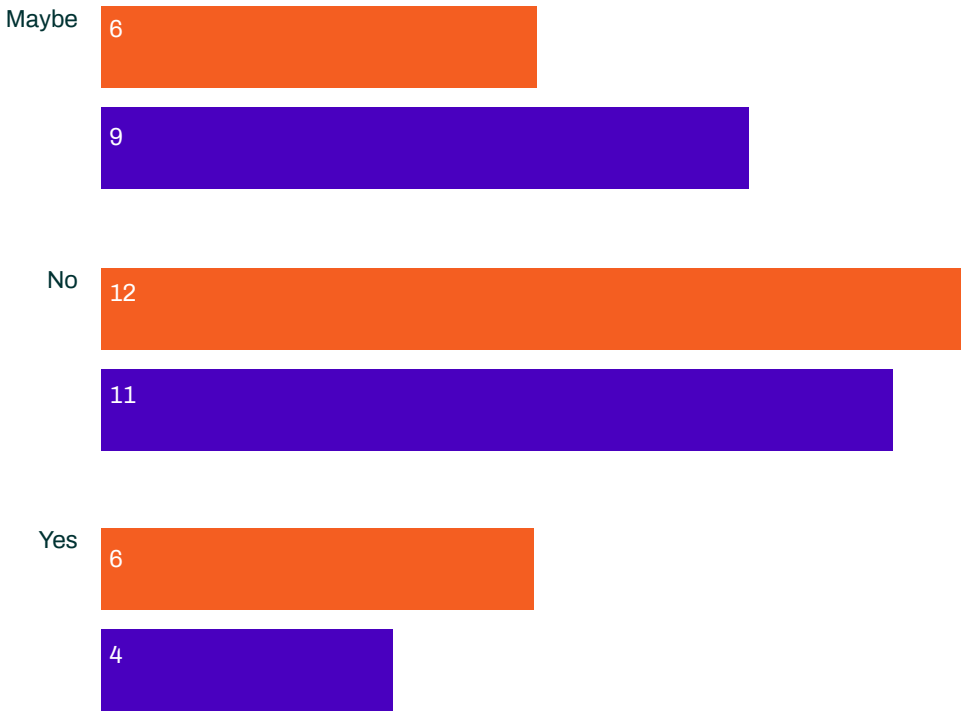## Have you sought or received AI training in the last year?

Does not use AI
Uses AI

24	24
17	
	12

No, has not sought AI training   Yes, has sought AI training
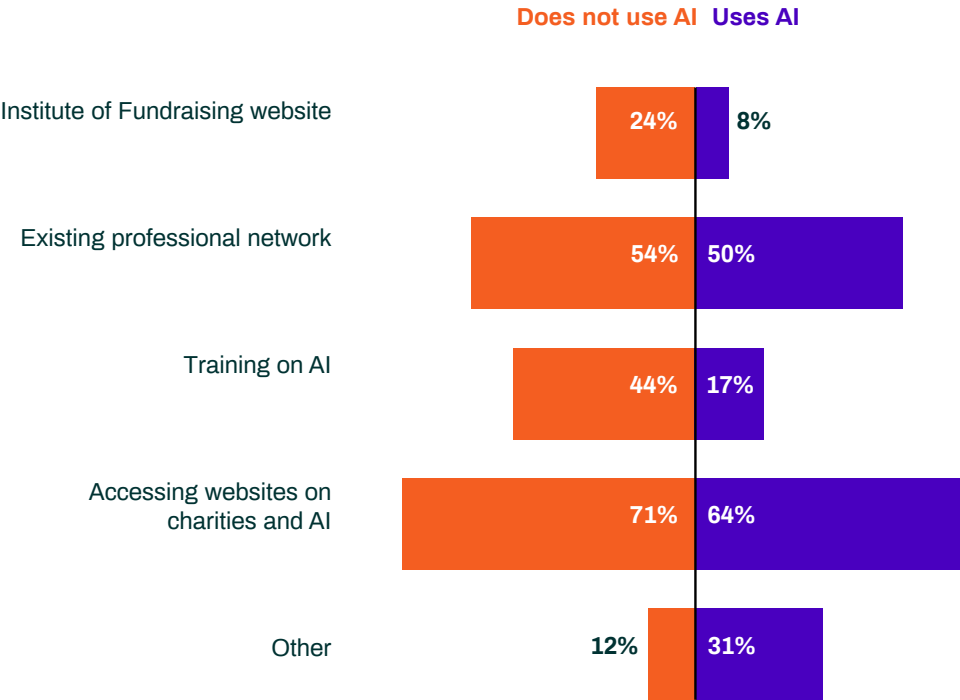

Where to find out information about training on AI for fundraisers

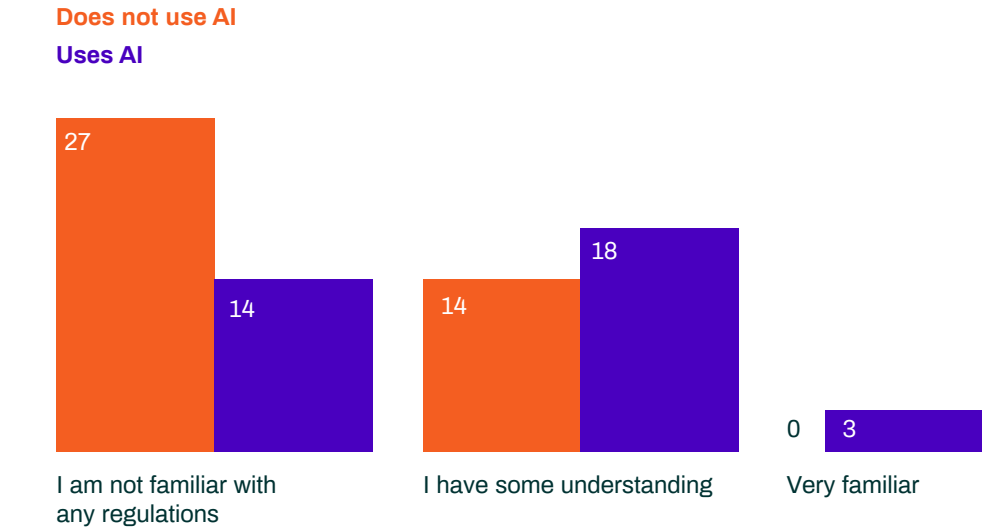## If you have not received any training, would you know where to get it from?

Does not use AI
Uses AI

Maybe 6
9

No 12
11

Yes 6
4

How respondents find information about AI

Does not use AI   **Uses AI**

Institute of Fundraising website	24%	8%
Existing professional network	54%	50%
Training on AI	44%	17%
Accessing websites on charities and AI	71%	64%
Other	12%	31%

How familiar are you with regulation policies around the use of AI?

Does not use AI

Uses AI

	I am not familiar with any regulations	I have some understanding	Very familiar
Does not use AI	27	14	0
Uses AI	14	18	3

Are you aware of any UK policy guidelines to assist fundraisers in the use of AI?

	No, I am not aware	Yes, I am aware
Does not use AI	100%	0%
Uses AI	77%	23%
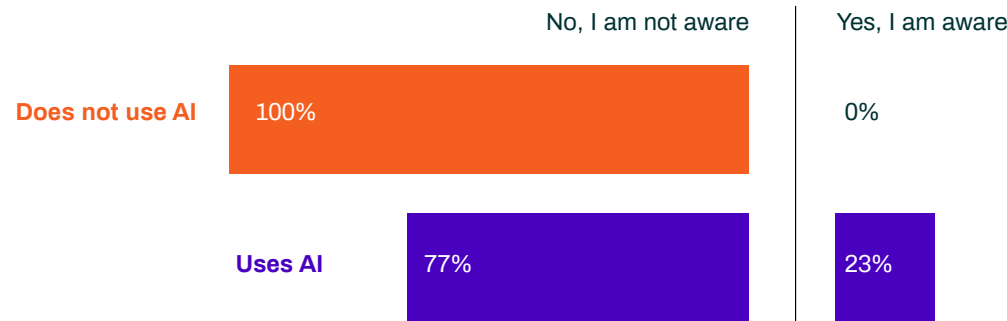
THANK YOU

In February 2024, Dr Herrero proposed the idea of a research project mapping out perceptions and uses of AI across the fundraising sector was first proposed to Rob Cope (Executive Director of Membership and Operations, CIoF). A team consisting of researchers and professional fundraisers was led by Dr Herrero and it included, from the University of York: Professor Jonathan Hook, Mary Haworth (Director of the Office of Philanthropic Partnerships and Alumni, OPPA), Hannah Droop (OPPA), and Dr Shauna Concannon based at Durham University.

A collaboration between the CIoF and both universities was finally agreed and signed in October 2024. We wish to thank the University of York for supporting the project with its Internally Distributed Fund, which has also enabled us to work with Thelma Osorio Euan, our research assistant.

Finally, a big thank you to all those who have responded to our survey and to those who have participated in our interviews. Without your time, and support, this research would not have been possible.

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About the Chartered Institute of Fundraising

Together we are the future of fundraising. We champion our members' excellence in fundraising. We support fundraisers through professional development and education. We connect fundraisers across all sectors and skill sets to share and learn with each other. So that together we can best serve our causes and communities both now and in the future.

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