

Nonprofits and Generative AI



AI has the potential to supercharge the impact of nonprofits by both enabling completely new approaches to social impact as well as freeing up employees' time to focus on innovative work that furthers the mission of their organizations.

We've heard from many social impact organizations that they want to harness the power of generative AI technology to help them achieve results faster and find new, creative ways to approach the problems they're tackling. To understand how we can best support the social impact ecosystem, we asked nonprofits to tell us more about how they're using these tools currently and what barriers exist to adoption.

We reached out to participants in the [Google for Nonprofits](#) program for this survey and over 4,600 organizations gave us their input across 65 countries; we're pleased to share our findings in this summary report.

In the short time since generative AI gained widespread attention, adoption across the private sector has grown at an unprecedented rate. Within the US retail sector alone, a [recent study by Google Cloud](#) found that 81% of retail decision-makers feel urgency to adopt generative AI in their business and 72% feel ready to deploy generative AI technology today.

That story isn't reflected in the social impact sector. Whether it's due to a lack of resources, awareness, or tools, our research (and the [research of others](#)) has shown that nonprofits are behind their private sector counterparts when it comes to harnessing the power of this technology.

Research shows that generative AI tools can help [improve productivity by 66%](#). Generative AI has the potential to benefit nonprofits by freeing them up from burdensome low-value tasks and by transforming the work they do, could act as a great equalizer for the communities they serve.

Mixed levels of nonprofit adoption

“Generative AI is being used at the individual contributor level, not by the organization as a whole.”

While generative AI is still in its early stages of broad adoption across the nonprofit sector, a significant number of nonprofits are already utilizing generative AI in their operations, with even more planning to do so in the future.

More than half of respondents (58%) say at least some members of their organization currently use generative AI in their day-to-day operations and 12% state that half or more members of their organization currently use the technology.

4 in 5
thought generative AI may
be applicable to the
communities they serve

On the flip side, that's 2 out of 5 organizations reporting no use of these tools and thereby potentially missing out on large-scale productivity gains, or transformative support for their beneficiaries.

Nonprofits with an international focus and larger teams more frequently reported that they use the technology, and significantly more nonprofits based in Asia Pacific (APAC) more frequently reported using generative AI than other regions.

We also saw trends in generative AI usage based on the topics in which organizations work. Nonprofits concentrated in business (84%), scientific (80%), education (65%), and legal (64%) disciplines had more frequently adopted generative AI tools than other areas. Teams working in sports (46%), religious (49%) and political (50%) domains use them less often.

Despite mixed levels of adoption among nonprofits, the majority of respondents (81%) told us that they thought generative AI may be applicable to the communities they serve.

Top use cases

“We use it for creatively producing online posts and emails and generally doing communication outreach.”

Whether organizations were already using generative AI or had yet to use it but thought it could be helpful in the future, marketing and fundraising stood out as areas that nonprofits believe have the biggest potential for AI to be useful. This mirrors [existing research](#) that suggests generative AI could [speed up productivity for business communications by 40% and increase quality by 18%](#).

This mirrors what we’ve heard from nonprofits anecdotally, with the most common uses including:

- **Marketing and content creation:** Creating personalized marketing campaigns that are engaging, informative, and more likely to resonate with potential donors.
- **Fundraising:** Automating repetitive tasks related to fundraising, such as grant writing and customized donor communications.
- **Program Management:** Writing content for their programs like emails, letters, fliers, and cover letters.

There were some small differences by geographic region in which applications nonprofits felt generative AI had the most potential to be helpful. Organizations in the Americas for example are more interested in the ways that fundraising can be supported by these tools, whereas those in APAC told us they have more interest in administrative uses.

•
• **50%**
• of those surveyed said they
• plan to provide the
• communities they serve with
generative AI training

We also saw slight variations by size of organization. Nonprofits with more employees showed increased interest in support with administrative areas, while smaller organizations felt there was most potential within fundraising and marketing.

Across the board, almost all of the top use cases related to drafting or personalizing content, with only around a third of respondents identifying strategic uses (like program analysis or volunteer matching) as a potential area of benefit.

Barriers to adoption

“Time is an issue, so AI training for non technical minded people in plain language would be welcome.”

It’s clear that within the nonprofit sector, there is still demand for upskilling on the ways generative AI can be used. None of the nonprofits surveyed believe the majority of their organization is trained or educated on AI, in fact, more than 40% of respondents said that none of their staff were trained, educated or fluent in AI. Nonprofits, which are already strapped for resources, are concerned about the amount of time it would take to upskill on generative AI technology.

Across the board, nonprofits told us that the biggest issues preventing them from harnessing the potential of generative AI in their work are:

1. **Awareness:** A lack of familiarity with generative AI and its use cases (64%)
2. **Tools:** Selecting which generative AI resources/tools to use and implementation (62%)
3. **Funding:** Lack of funding to support generative AI usage (51%)
4. **Training:** Inability to access sufficient training (50%)

These challenges were consistent across organizations of different sizes, topic focus and geographic areas.

For those currently using generative AI (at any level), selecting and implementing AI resources and tools was the top challenge; while nonprofits not using AI in any way tended to report a lack of familiarity with the technology and its use cases as a key barrier. Only 25% of organizations told us that they have “concrete ideas” for how generative AI is applicable in their organization.

Over a third
of respondents rated their
current understanding of
generative AI as low

Respondents reported that they felt the roles with the most need for generative AI training were volunteers, CEOs and marketing. Given the wide differences in these jobs, accessible AI resources should be broadly applicable and use plain, easy-to-understand language.

Recommendations

We believe the private sector should seek to provide training on these tools at low or no cost to ensure civil society does not get left behind as the technology advances. As part of this, Google.org will develop free training and educational resources for nonprofits at scale, to support every social impact organization in exploring the potential benefits that generative AI could bring to their work.

It's also important to note that applications of generative AI go beyond supporting nonprofits in their day-to-day work. In some cases this technology has the potential to completely transform the work they do and the ways they support people; half of those surveyed told us that they plan to provide the communities they serve with generative AI training. This is an entirely new stream of work for many of these organizations, and it has the potential to unlock even greater impact for beneficiaries.

Beyond delivering training, generative AI can help nonprofits analyze huge sets of data, build personalized tutors, and provide unprecedented levels of support to their beneficiaries. We are already working to support organizations that are trying out new approaches to harnessing generative AI and hope their work will inspire others to do the same.

Some of the top examples of work harnessing the power of generative AI include:

- **Jacaranda Health** partners with governments to enhance the quality of maternal and newborn care in government hospitals. They're planning to scale support to mothers who live in underserved areas using Natural Language Processing that has been trained in African languages. This model will expand PROMPTS, a digital health service that reaches mothers through SMS messaging. This will be the first NLP model that is run by African people and trained in African languages.
- **U.S. Digital Response (USDR)** helps governments, nonprofits, and public entities respond quickly to critical public needs, by activating highly skilled talent, leveraging new technology, and partnering directly with governments and nonprofits. They're testing and creating public sector applications and case studies for generative AI, aiming to deliver practical tools and services that enhance government efficiency and impact. USDR will support government partners in adopting generative AI by overseeing and providing support for recruiting, scoping and onboarding.

- **EIDU** has successfully created a comprehensive learning platform that has been implemented in numerous schools across Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana. Now through low-cost smartphones, EIDU will implement a new solution using generative AI to provide a personalized tutoring service for pupils in low and middle income countries. Their work will also include content for teachers, such as lesson plans, and personalized digital learning exercises and assessments.

These organizations are showing that generative AI can be applied directly to social impact work to provide more detailed, personalized and targeted support to beneficiaries, and open up new possibilities for addressing complex challenges. We're excited to see the ways in which generative AI will increase internal productivity and supercharge the work of social impact organizations around the world.