

**FORWARD  
ACTION**

FROM ROADBLOCKS TO RESULTS:

# Solving the 5 biggest tech challenges for charities in 2025.



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# 01



The state of digital  
mobilisation in the  
charity sector

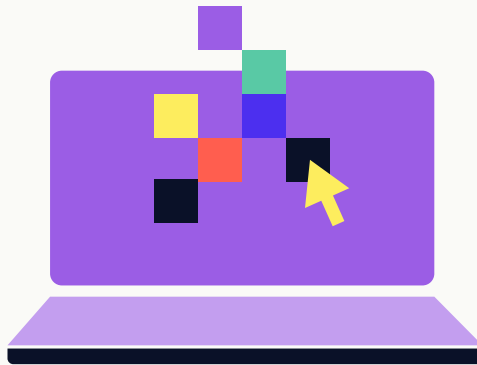


Digital mobilisation has transformed activism and advocacy over the past two decades. Starting out in US presidential campaigns of the 2000s, where progressive tech strategies helped elect the first Black president. Those same tools and tactics spread globally, allowing organisations to empower supporters to donate, sign petitions, contact decision-makers, and organise canvassing efforts that drive real-world change.

Some platforms have come and gone, while others have evolved and endured.

# The state of digital mobilisation in the charity sector

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Today, new tools are emerging that are built for fast, multi-channel campaigning. Engaging Networks, Action Network, and Impact Stack remain widely used for digital mobilisation, while CRMs like Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics are helping charities manage supporters more effectively. Excitingly, newer tools, like Movement for digital mobilisation and FundraiseUp for fundraising, are designed to help organisations run high-impact, integrated campaigns with less friction.

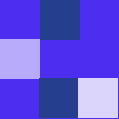
Yet many charities are held back from feeling the true potential of digital mobilisation by siloed thinking, slow-moving tech procurement, and a lack of digital skills. Poor integration, underutilised data, and leadership buy-in remain major barriers.

Meanwhile, the right and far-right are using established and emerging digital platforms with alarming effectiveness to mobilise their supporters and shift public discourse. To compete, progressive organisations must build strong foundations to help fight back and power change. At its core, the strategy is simple - grow large, engaged supporter lists, reach out to them regularly with meaningful actions that will drive change.

AI is reshaping the digital world, and it's impossible to sit on the sidelines. We know that bad actors will use it to manipulate narratives, but progressive organisations can be smart and ethical in how they adopt AI. Used well, AI can help us better understand data, improve campaign performance, and increase outputs without increasing staff burden. The challenge is to harness AI for good while staying true to ethical and transparent campaigning.

Digital mobilisation should reflect the people and causes it serves, yet digital accessibility is often overlooked. From website usability to inclusive design, building accessible campaigns isn't just a best practice, it's essential. Making sure that everyone can engage, regardless of ability or background, should be a core principle, not an afterthought.

This report is designed to help you identify what's holding your organisation back from unlocking the full potential of people power. Join us as we compare challenges with the wider sector, and take practical steps to break through digital roadblocks. Whether it's choosing the right platforms, securing leadership buy-in, or strengthening your team's skills, we hope this provides a roadmap to move beyond barriers and realise your full mobilisation potential.



# 02



## Executive summary



## Executive summary

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Hi – I’m Dylan, the Head of Technology at Forward Action. We’ve spent a decade helping our charity partners to use digital channels to mobilise millions of people to take action and win the fights that matter.



We’ve seen that when it works well, mobilisation tech has the power to transform the impact of charities and NGOs. A great tech infrastructure helps reach more people, makes it easy for people to take action, and for organisations to drive real change. But for many fundraisers, campaigners and organisers, tech feels more like an obstacle than an opportunity.

That’s why we set out to uncover the biggest tech challenges in the sector, and crucially, to set out the next steps that can help you overcome them.

We’d like to thank all the organisations and individuals who shared their insights as part of this research. Your voices have helped shape the future of digital mobilisation, and we’re grateful for your time and expertise.

Through our conversations and experiences, we’ve identified the five key tech challenges holding progressive organisations back in 2025, and the steps to tackle them. We know that changing tech isn’t easy, but it’s essential to help power the changes in the world we all want to see. We’re excited to kick-start this conversation with the sector and would love to hear your experiences, get in touch: [hello@forwardaction.uk](mailto:hello@forwardaction.uk).

## Executive summary

This report draws on in-depth interviews with charities across the sector and survey insights. We know that tackling these challenges isn't simple, but we hope this helps provide a starting point to move past tech roadblocks and towards real results!

### CHALLENGE 1:

#### Fragmented systems and poor integration

**Next step:** Look for opportunities to consolidate systems where possible and improve integrations to streamline digital mobilisation activities.



### CHALLENGE 2:

#### Lack of skills and capacity

**Next step:** Invest in training for core digital platforms and build cross-functional teams that bridge technical and campaign needs.



### CHALLENGE 3:

#### Leadership support and strategic alignment

**Next step:** Engage senior leadership early when developing digital strategies, and advocate for budget flexibility to allow for innovation.



### CHALLENGE 4:

#### Underutilised data analytics

**Next step:** Identify the right data analytics tools for your organisation and ensure staff have the skills to interpret and act on the insights.



### CHALLENGE 5:

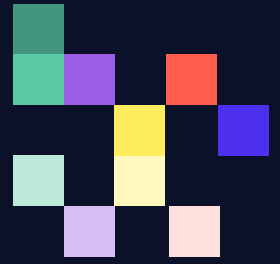
#### Accessibility and inclusivity as afterthoughts

**Next step:** Embed accessibility as a core principle in all digital projects, from design to implementation, rather than a luxury add-on.





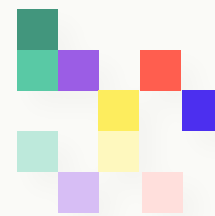
# 03



5 key challenges  
to overcome



## 5 key challenges to overcome



# 01 Fragmented systems and poor integration

### Summary

We've heard lots of concerns about current CRM systems, specifically highlighting limitations in functionality, integration, and customisation. Consolidating platforms can help solve integration issues and unlock digital mobilisation potential.

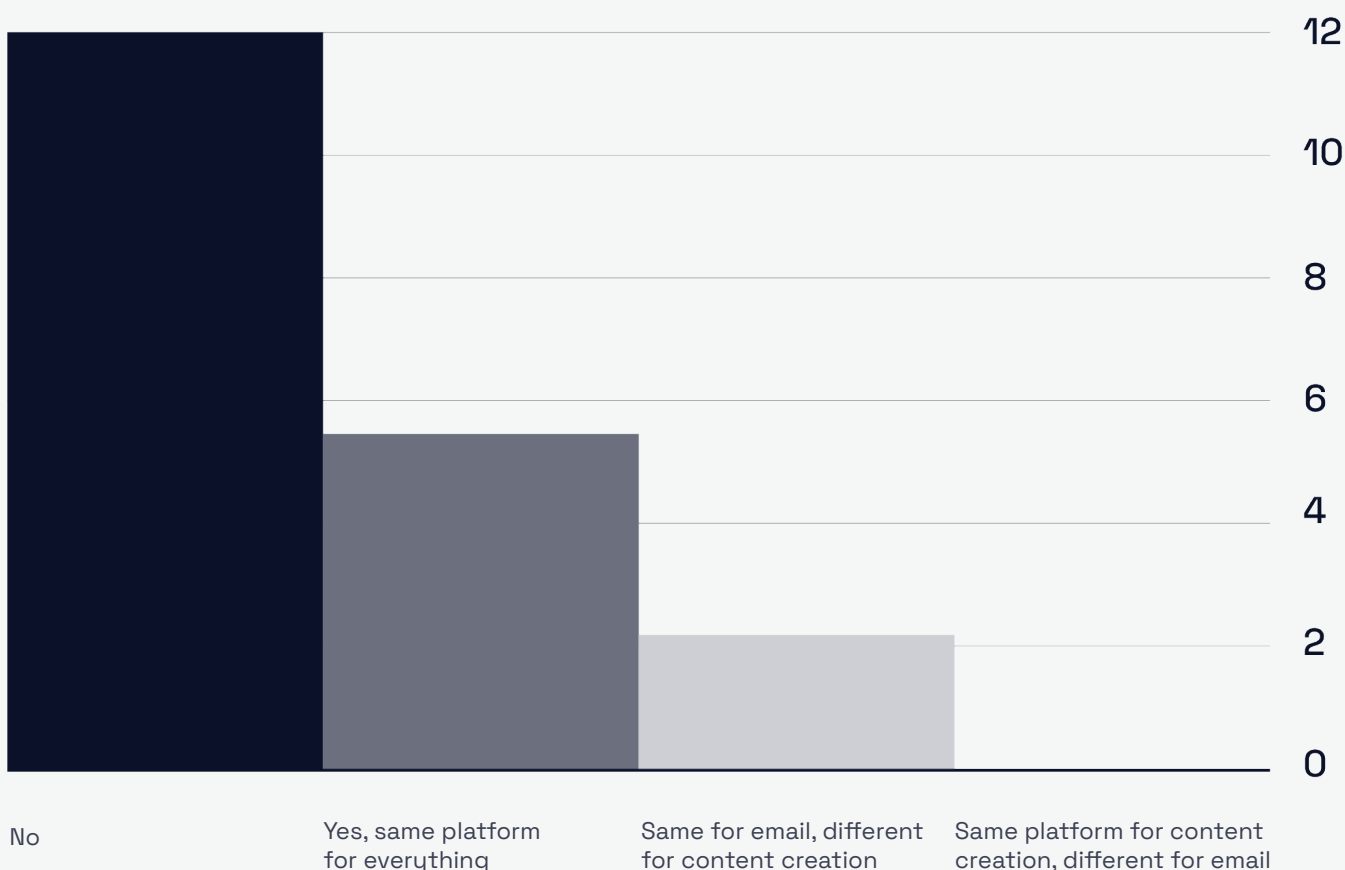
Almost all organisations we spoke to use at least 9 different tools for their digital mobilisation programme, yet only 16% said their systems integrate well with each

other. Most organisations felt negative or neutral about platform integrations.

When systems don't work well together, it makes digital mobilisation and campaigning harder than it should be.

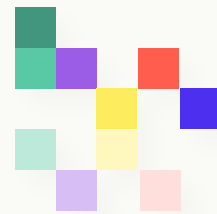
And the impact of this is not lost on these organisations either, with over 72% indicating that poorly integrated systems have an impact on their digital activities.

Is your email platform the same one you use for email building and content creation (webpages, digital mobilisation actions etc.)?



## 5 key challenges to overcome

FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS AND POOR INTEGRATION



### Common issues include:

- CRMs lacking customisation and integration capabilities
- Needing to use manual rather than automated processes
- Poor platform data analysis, which would make it easier to spot integration issues
- A lack of in-house tech skills to make full use of CRMs and their integrations.

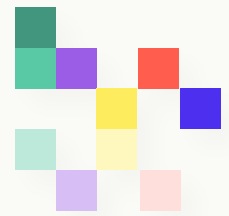
Many interview participants felt that popular CRMs, including DotDigital and Raiser's Edge, are not fully suitable for campaigning actions, and so are turning to bigger non-campaigning specific CRMs, including Salesforce and Microsoft Dynamics to solve their integration issues. But these platforms often require custom set ups and in-house tech skills which are not always readily available at NGO organisations, and especially in campaigning teams.

“We’re often battling systems that aren’t quite up to scratch and don’t quite talk with each other properly.”

(Fundraiser, national campaigning charity)

## 5 key challenges to overcome

FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS AND POOR INTEGRATION



“The bigger the organisation, the more likely they are to have a Salesforce integration that plugs into smaller bespoke systems, but these often don’t talk to each other well.”

(Tom, Digital Mobilisation Consultant)

### What does Forward Action think?

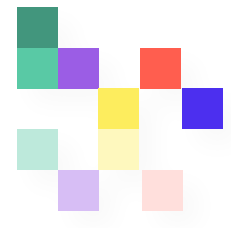
The ideal way to avoid integration issues is to consolidate your systems where possible, so that you can carry out all your digital mobilisation activities in one platform. And the good news is - you don’t need to. There’s plenty of great tools out there for specific roles, the key is in making sure they can talk to each other without manual intervention.

In a perfect world, you would run your entire digital mobilisation programme on a single platform. That platform would need to include the following tools and features at a minimum:

- Audience segmentation
- Email building (and ideally SMS building)
- Automations and supporter journeys
- Page and signup form building (and the ability to build out different actions such as petitions, email-to-targets, donations, etc.)
- Supporter data management
- Accessible data analysis and reporting

## 5 key challenges to overcome

### FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS AND POOR INTEGRATION




However, it is far more likely that you are using different platforms for each of these. This isn't an issue as long as you're picking platforms that have native integration tools that allow your platforms to communicate relatively easily and without too much manual input.

If this isn't the case, a solution like Zapier, which creates automation links between any number of platforms, is a useful (although costly) option to reduce the manual labour of data imports.

When we struggled to find light touch, easy to set up, optimised sign up forms, we developed our Blueprint tool at Forward Action. In that process we set out to make sure it could integrate with as many CRMs as possible, and we use simple, easily accessible tools like Zapier to make that happen.

Movement is making exciting developments in the digital mobilisation space, although it's relatively new, the team behind it are bringing years of hands on mobilisation experience to create a suite of tools that allow orgs to create cross channel campaign communications. We're particularly excited by the opportunity to integrate WhatsApp for example.



“By making integration capabilities a **key\*** consideration when sourcing new platforms (including for email building and content creation), you will ensure a **much smoother** experience and allow you to make the most of all your platforms at once.”

Dylan, Head of Tech,  
Forward Action



## 02 Skills gaps and limited capacity are stalling progress



### Summary

Skills and resourcing often slow down digital mobilisation success in the charity sector. Smaller organisations can struggle to recruit staff with both strategic and technical expertise. Larger charities may have these skills, but are often slowed down by internal silos, slow-moving processes or lack of senior buy-in.

This isn't about a lack of effort - people are doing their best with the tools and structures they have. But without the right expertise and internal buy-in, organisations face slow-moving processes and missed opportunities, making it harder to build momentum when it's needed most.

## 5 key challenges to overcome

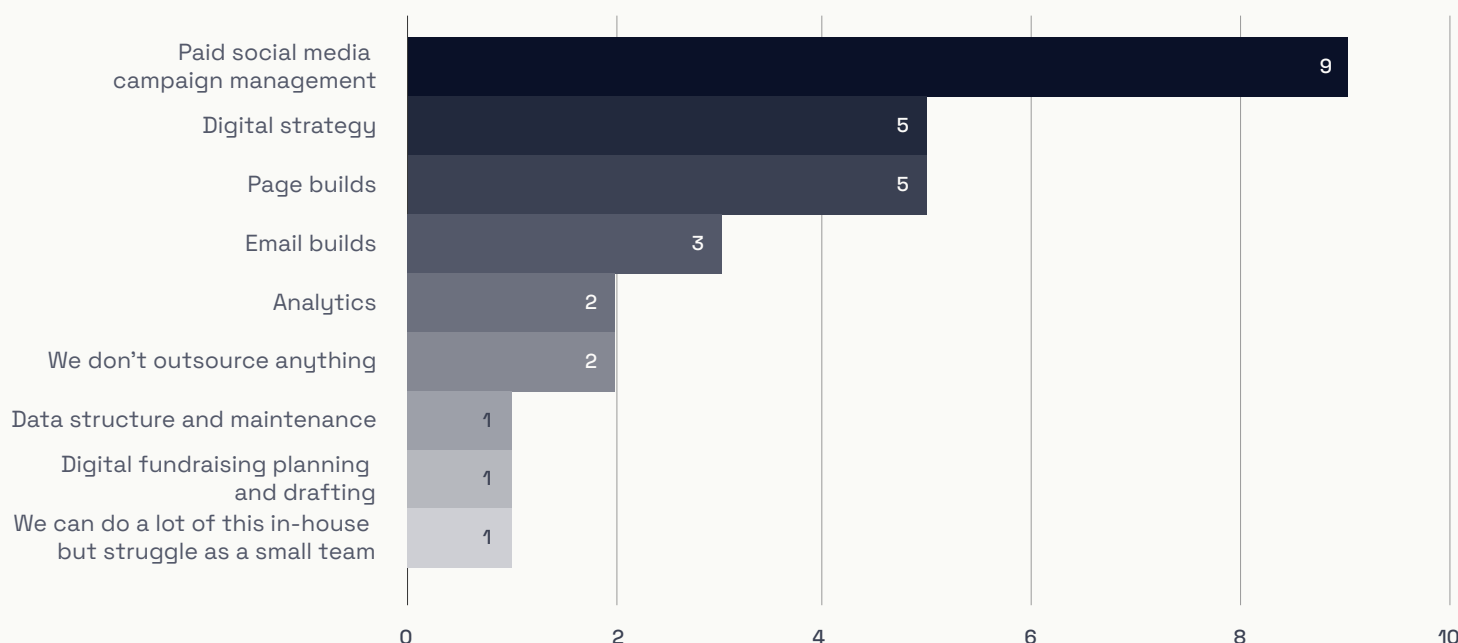
SKILLS GAPS AND LIMITED CAPACITY ARE STALLING PROGRESS



### This skills gap is a pressing issue

- 33% of respondents stated without any prompt that if they had a magic wand to improve their digital mobilisation programme, they would focus on staff, skills, and resourcing.
- A lack of in-house specialists makes it difficult to adopt new digital tactics and technologies. Only 11% of respondents said they had the expertise internally, while nearly 40% admitted they lacked the resources to seize new opportunities.
- Outsourcing is common, with 80% of organisations relying on external support as the graph below indicates.

**In situations where you outsource digital mobilisation resources, what areas do you commonly find you need to do this in?**



Without the right skills in-house, charities risk limiting their digital impact and missing opportunities to innovate.



## 5 key challenges to overcome

SKILLS GAPS AND LIMITED CAPACITY ARE STALLING PROGRESS



### What does Forward Action think?

There are two key areas to focus on in order to build up in-house resources:

1. Train staff in core digital platforms.
2. Build teams with cross-functional expertise, expanding beyond their role's core responsibilities

Training your team on the platforms they use is essential, but too often, staff only learn the tools they need for their daily tasks. This can mean key features go unnoticed, limiting what's possible. Investing time in deeper platform training upfront unlocks smarter, more strategic, and more efficient digital mobilisation.

This type of training will encourage your teams to become cross-functional and avoid internal silos, even as you expand.

An empowered, enthusiastic team is crucial to developing a great digital mobilisation programme. When it comes to digital, success is less about having the right role titles and hierarchies, and building a team with initiative and autonomy to move quickly, and act on new insight and opportunity.

“Most digital campaigners don't have the coding or technical skills to fully customise tools, and that limits their potential impact.”

(Manager, national charity)

## 5 key challenges to overcome

SKILLS GAPS AND LIMITED CAPACITY ARE STALLING PROGRESS



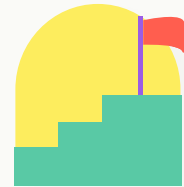
Your perfect world digital mobilisation team should be able to:

- write persuasive and strategic copy
- build emails and action pages that are optimised for conversion
- analyse your analytics and produce action-focused insights
- spot trends in data that could inform your digital strategy
- create engaging and eye-catching ads and social posts, across a range of platforms

There is also an opportunity to use AI in order to make internal, day-to-day tasks quicker and increase your team's capacity to focus on learning new skills. Forward Action has been working on our own AI policies and approach for the last year, and now implement it in multiple ways to boost internal efficiency.

“AI literacy should now be a core skill for us all. Finding the right AI-powered tools and ways of using them can take time and coordination, but once it clicks we've found the team can work both more efficiently and creatively than ever before.”

Helen Hector  
Strategy Director, Forward Action



### 03 Leadership support & strategic clarity are essential for success

“Leadership is supportive in theory, but they’re not involved enough in driving the digital strategy or ensuring proper resource allocation.”

(Manager, national children’s charity)

#### Summary

Our survey shows a good level of leadership involvement in digital initiatives and tools, but investment in proper resource allocation can hold teams back from testing out new digital tools or building their digital strategy.

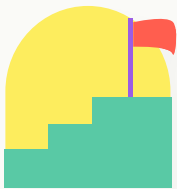
While leadership teams are often open to digital strategies and tools, financial constraints and hiring skilled staff are common barriers to progress.

Many organisations struggle to get investment for new technologies, especially during organisational change and strategic uncertainty.

Despite leadership involvement, digital strategies are primarily driven by teams rather than top-down initiatives. Resource allocation is a real challenge for many; without proper investment, teams struggle to fully implement and maximise their digital strategies. A shift in mindset is also needed, particularly in viewing technology and supporter engagement as long-term investments rather than short-term costs. Without this, even the most well-supported strategies risk falling short of their potential impact.

# 5 key challenges to overcome

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND STRATEGIC CLARITY ARE ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS



What support do you need from leadership to enhance your digital mobilisation efforts?

More money for investment 64.7%

More skilled people to deliver 64.7%

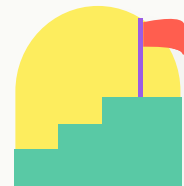
Clear strategic direction 52.9%

Organisational and/or senior stakeholder buy-in 23.5%

Freedom to test and innovate 23.5%

## 5 key challenges to overcome

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND STRATEGIC CLARITY ARE ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS



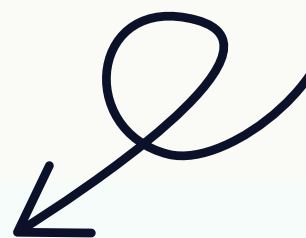
### What does Forward Action think?

Whilst it's clear that digital strategies can be created without leadership involvement, we see that where digital is championed and well understood at a senior level, those strategies have a much higher chance of succeeding.

Digital strategies should include budget flexibility for rapid pivots to allow teams to seize on new opportunities and technological development. It's key that leadership understands the fast-changing digital environment and that slow internal processes can hinder digital progress and progress in general. The far-right has become very effective at mobilising its supporters to shift public discourse.

Progressive organisations must build responsive digital foundations to help fight back and power change, and to do this, budgets need to reflect this flexibility.

Take AI for example. It's a game-changing innovation that's disrupting every sector, but progressive causes have been slow to adapt and slow to adopt AI-based technologies. And while inflexible digital strategies and leadership are not the only reasons behind this, it does reveal a key inability of the sector to work with new and emerging tech.



“In digital mobilisation, being able to move **\*quickly** matters as much as your strategy itself. If leadership teams take months (or even years) to justify budget decisions, they'll miss the opportunities right in front of them. The organisations that thrive online are those that **champion agile thinking** - testing, iterating, and **evolving** with the digital landscape.”

Ali Walker Davies  
Acting CEO, Forward Action



## 04 Building confidence in data analytics will power your strategies

“We collect a lot of information, but we don’t necessarily analyse it and apply it in the most effective ways. The analysis doesn’t always happen, and that’s something we’re trying to work on.”

(Strategy director, youth activist movement)

### Summary

From talking to charities across the sector, there’s clear room for improvement in the way data analytics are being used. Responses reflected a significant skills-gap when it comes to collecting and interpreting data into something that is strategically useful.

Whilst the majority of respondents indicated that data analytics does inform their digital strategy, almost 80% indicated that these tools have not been effective in achieving their organisational goals, or have had no significant impact.

## 5 key challenges to overcome

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN DATA ANALYTICS WILL POWER YOUR STRATEGIES



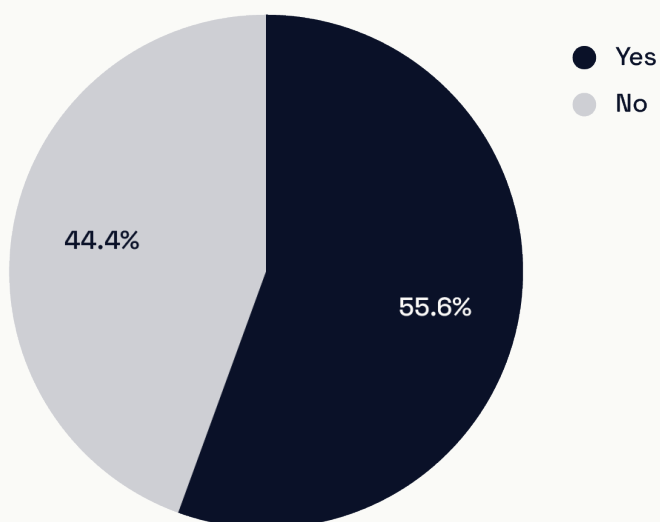
Interview respondents described teams' experience with analytics in the following ways:

- The team finds analytics tools baffling.
- The team struggles with analysing and applying the data effectively.
- The team hasn't fully explored the potential of these tools due to a lack of skills and understanding of how to leverage them effectively.

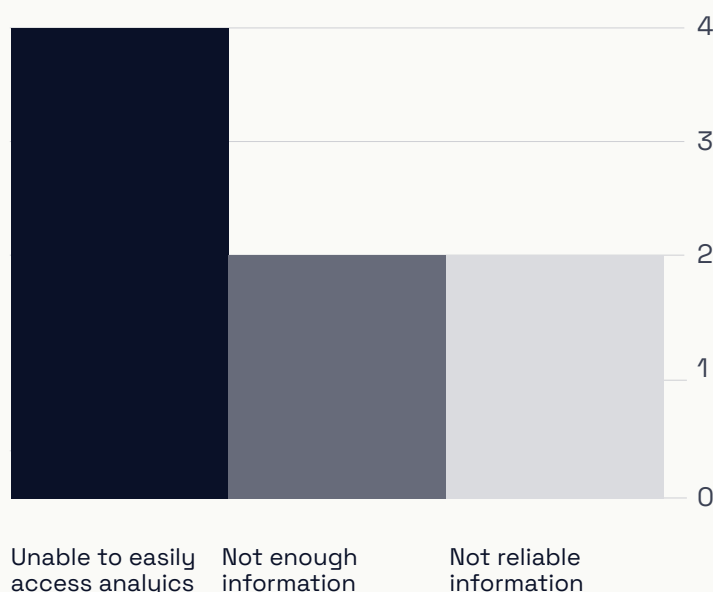
This points to a widespread underinvestment in data analytics. When asked "Who is involved in delivering your digital mobilisation programme?" only 27% of organisations reported having an in-house data analyst. Meanwhile, just 11% outsource data analysis support, meaning at most, only 38% have access to dedicated data expertise.

CRM analytics and reporting tools are often seen as even more ineffective. One organisation even stated that their CRM's "analytics tools are so bad that we've had to build custom solutions to extract actionable data."

Does your data analytics inform your digital strategy?



If not, why?





## 5 key challenges to overcome

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN DATA ANALYTICS WILL POWER YOUR STRATEGIES



### What does Forward Action think?

Google Analytics 4 is the most widely-used analytics tool, but it's currently underperforming for many organisations.

During the transition to GA4, we helped many partners migrate from Universal Analytics, updating their site, their on-page events and their cookie banners to make sure data was being captured properly. We also partnered with organisations to provide GA4 training and set up custom reports that would enable them to make the most of the new tool, especially as they had no in-house analytics experts.

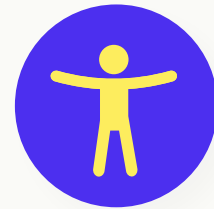
Investing in staff training in the tools that your team is using is our number one recommendation here. Being able to analyse data, pull out insights, and develop reports are key to building an effective digital mobilisation strategy. We encourage all team members to undertake training in data analytics tool literacy, and anyone involved

in strategic decision making should be able to interpret data.

Beyond training, the tool you choose will make a big difference. While partners have often reported frustration with GA4, other tools have been positively reviewed. For example Oxfam GB, uses Power BI and Salesforce to pull together meaningful reporting and insights. While it's true that not all charities will have the same resources or budget available as Oxfam, your organisation should value analytics as much as it values campaign creative, because it's only when you can really measure what's happening, that you can begin to build on it. Limitations to data integration across different platforms make it challenging to have a comprehensive view of supporter engagement, but investing in the tech and not just relying on free tools like GA4 can have a positive impact.

“Our [trends dashboard](#) is a powerful analytics report that pulls in performance data from across all Forward Action partners. It gives our strategist a real-time pulse on what's working. It helps us [spot high-performing tactics](#), guide partners with [data-backed strategies](#), and provide up-to-date [benchmarks](#). With this insight, we can quickly identify where to optimise and make sure our decisions are driven by [results](#).”

Gar Man  
Reporting & Optimisation Officer, Forward Action



# 05 Putting Accessibility and Inclusivity Front and Centre

### Summary

Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, accessibility and inclusivity are often seen as afterthoughts. While some charities have invested in making their digital products more accessible, many respondents felt that digital inclusivity is not prioritised in wider DEI conversations.

When asked “How inclusive are your digital services, and how do you monitor and improve this inclusivity?”:

- 33% of respondents said their organisation does nothing (or they were unsure if it does anything),
- 22% said they have some kind of accessibility checks and policies in place but could be doing more,
- while only 16% could list initiatives that were in place and sounded confident in their approach.

Organisations that work directly with affected users or members of the public were more likely to have accessibility policies in place, but also thought there was more they could be doing.

“All of our content is reviewed against internal ‘decolonisation’, feminist and anti-racist guidelines. These are also baked into our brand guidelines as an organisation. Still more to do, but it’s a start.”

(Survey respondent)

“For digital and printed literature we aim to vary the reading age of our content to improve accessibility but we have lots of work to do to address other barriers.”

(Survey respondent)

The main barriers to accessibility and inclusion in digital services include limited resources, lack of expertise, and organisational priorities that overlook digital inclusivity.

## 5 key challenges to overcome

PUTTING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY FRONT AND CENTRE



### What does Forward Action think?

Improving accessibility starts with 'quick wins' - here's some to improve your digital services:

Include accessibility as a requirement in all your project briefs. This includes internal team briefings and project plans, and also design or development briefs for external contractors.

Make sure your team understands the basics of accessibility principles. Some questions you could ask:

To your developers - do you know about WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards and how do they incorporate this into your builds? Can you use a tool like Axe DevTools - a browser plugin which does an accessibility review of a page?

To your designers - do you run your designs through accessibility tools, e.g. to check colour contrast using an online contrast checker? You can also add alt text into images to make them more accessible for screenreaders.

To your content creators - do you make sure all content is readable and understandable by the majority of your audiences? For example, Hemingwayapp can help suggest where you could simplify your writing.

These initiatives need little-to-no extra time and investment, but by incorporating them into your day-to-day activities, you and your team can put accessibility front of mind when developing online content.

“Accessibility isn’t a nice-to-have - it’s a fundamental part of creating digital tools that work for everyone. If we don’t embed it into our processes, we’re not just excluding people; we’re failing in our responsibility to build ethical, effective digital products. The good news is many accessibility improvements are quick, low-cost, and benefit all users -not just those with specific needs.”

Anya Muir Wood  
Head of Creative, Forward Action

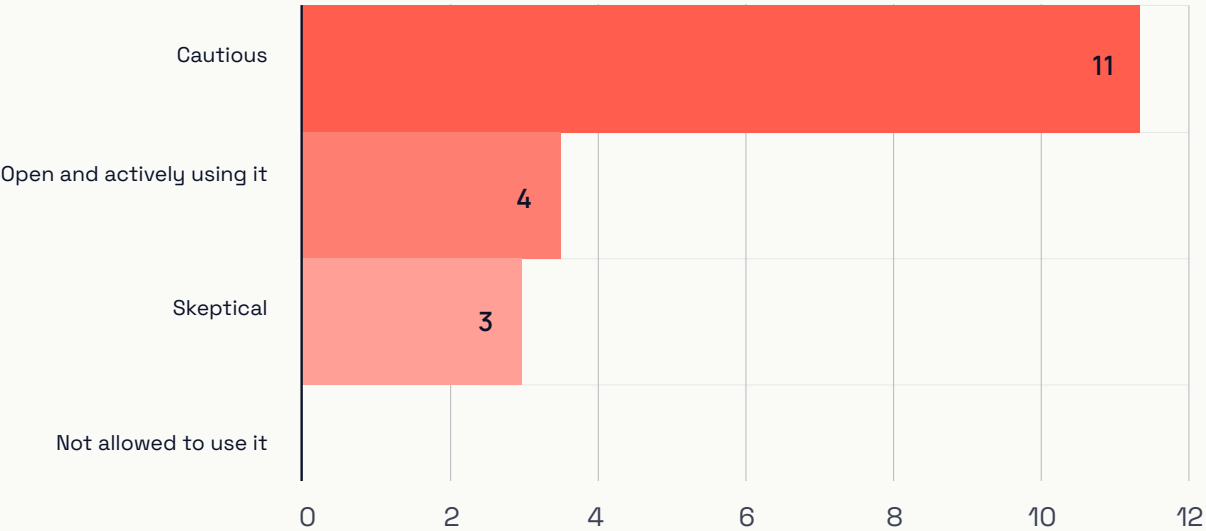


# 04

## Spotlight on AI

“Fear”, “risk”, “cautious”: these were a few of the words used to describe the NGO sector’s feelings about the adoption of AI. Both a lack of understanding and resource is holding organisations back from using AI to their advantage.

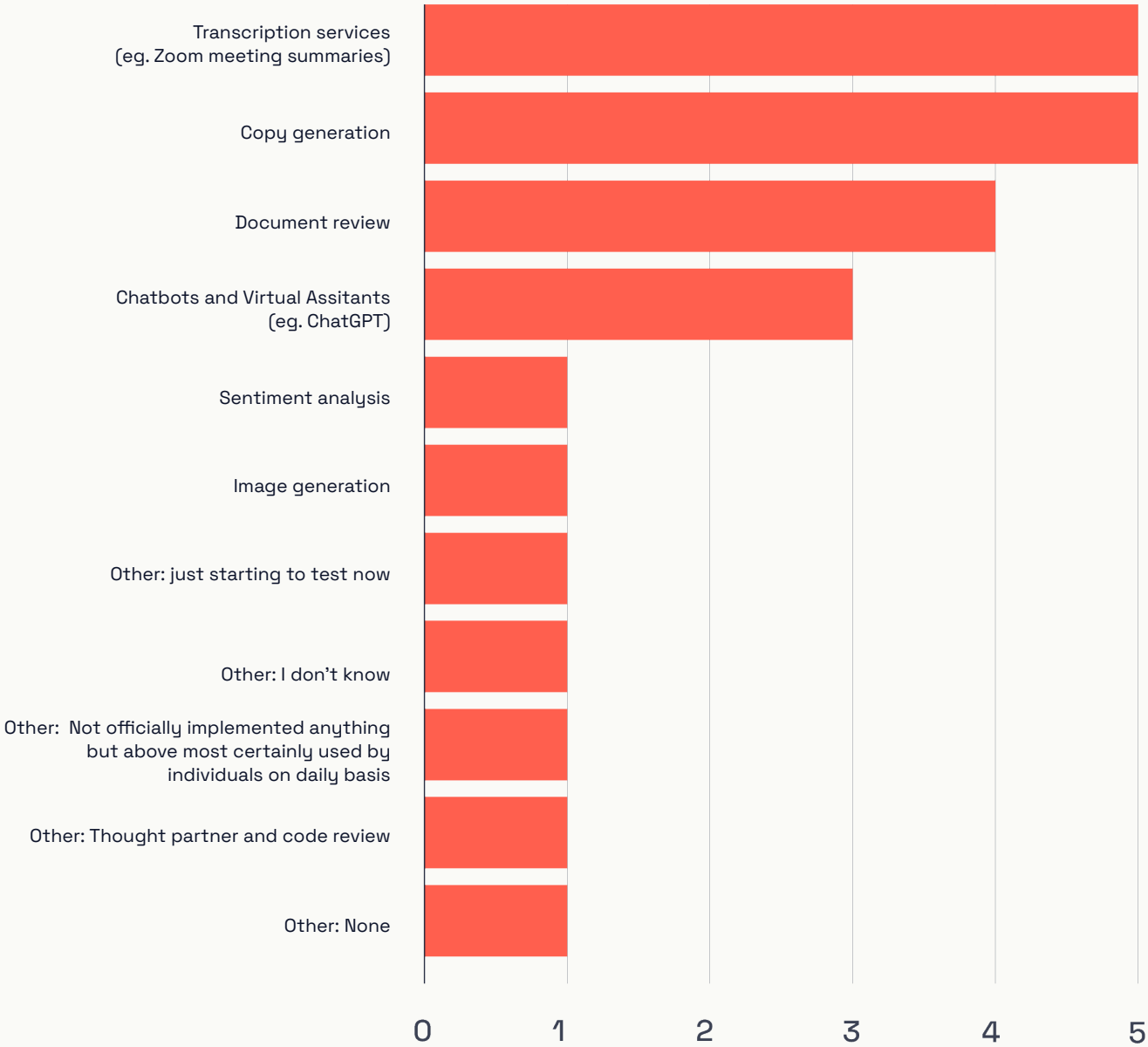
What is your organisation’s attitude towards AI?



AI adoption in the sector is largely focused on time-saving tasks, rather than integrated into digital mobilisation strategies or supporter engagement. Its use is driven by individuals rather than organisation-wide strategy, meaning many charities are missing the opportunity to harness AI in a more strategic, impactful way.

# Spotlight on AI

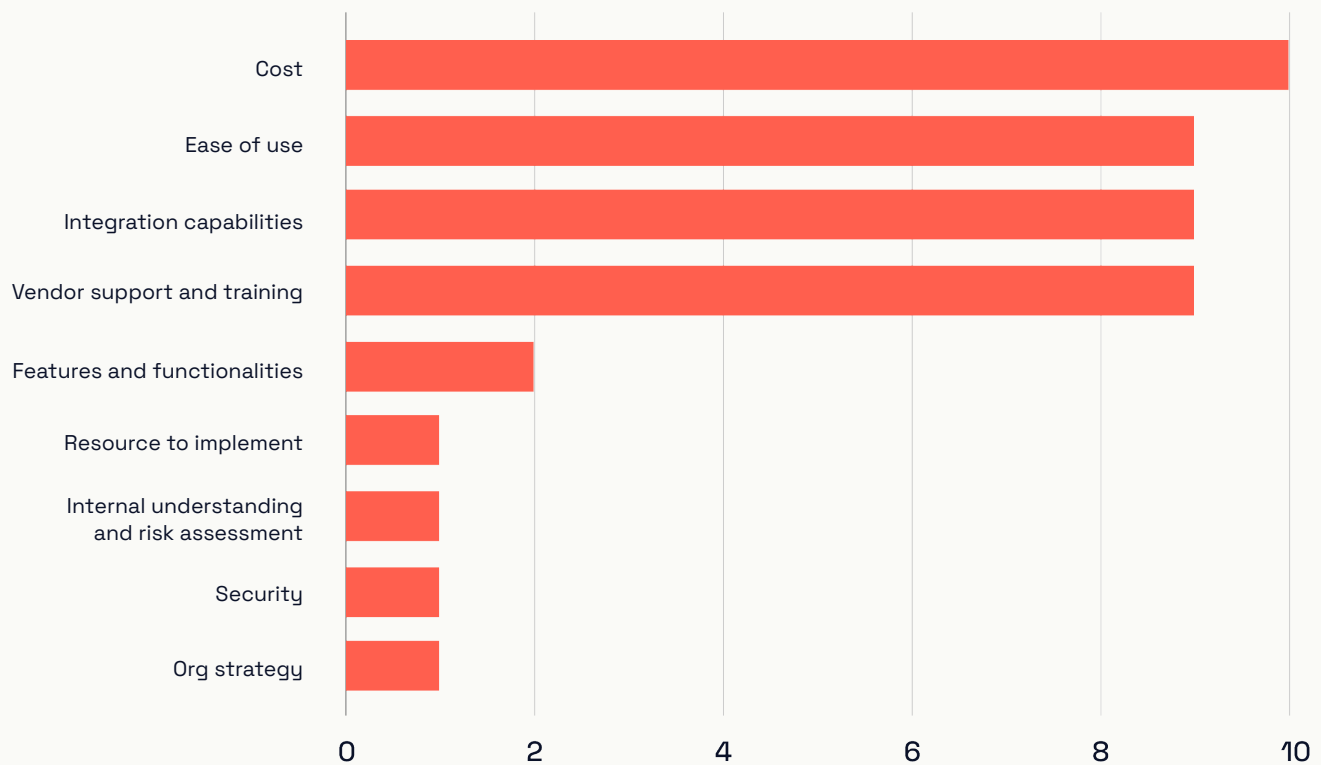
In relation to AI, what have you implemented in your organisation?



When asked what drives your organisation’s technology adoption decisions, “Internal understanding and risk” was only mentioned once, but this was flagged as the most common reason for not adopting AI in the organisation. Rigorous procurement processes are common in the sector, but AI is a technology rather than a platform, so it needs evaluating within the context of how people use and implement it - not an easy task.

## Spotlight on AI

What are the key factors driving your technology adoption decisions?



All of the above has led to a sector which is hesitant to adopt new technology, even if it could increase the capacity of team members, and transform the impact of service delivery or supporter mobilisation.

“AI has huge potential to simplify tasks, but fear around GDPR and lack of technical expertise are holding organisations back.”  
(Tom, Digital Mobilisation Consultant)



## Spotlight on AI

The key concerns around the adoption of AI are:

- Data privacy/sensitivity
- Ethical concerns
- Lack of general belief in AI's impact

Despite these concerns, many participants did acknowledge the opportunities that they believe AI can offer, such as AI tools built into email clients that allow more automation and personalisation and insights on supporter behaviour or reporting.

Organisations that invest in putting AI policies in place, white-listing tools and providing training for staff will soon be rising above those that don't.

“The potential for AI to improve supporter journeys is significant, but we haven't yet explored it fully in campaigns.”

(Mobilisation lead, national charity)



# 05

## Conclusion

## Conclusion

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### Key takeaways

Technology is at the heart of effective digital mobilisation, yet many charities face barriers that limit their ability to harness its full potential. The good news? With the right approach, technology is most certainly an enabler rather than a blocker.

# Conclusion

To unlock its full potential, charities need to make proactive investments, secure leadership buy-in, and commit to continuous learning. Those that do will be best positioned to drive engagement, mobilise supporters, and scale their impact in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Roadblocks the biggest tech challenges	Solutions how to overcome it	Result transformation & impact
Fragmented systems & poor integration	Consolidating platforms and ensuring smoother integrations	A seamless, efficient digital ecosystem that drives supporter engagement & maximises impact.
Lack of skills & capacity	Upskilling staff and fostering cross-functional teams	A digitally confident team that can innovate, adapt, & execute high-impact campaigns.
Rigid leadership structures & lack of strategic buy-in	Securing leadership buy-in and flexible budgeting	A future-proof digital strategy with leadership backing and the resources to scale.
Underutilised data analytics	Investing in the right analytics tools and trainin	Data-driven decision-making that enhances performance, improves supporter journeys, & maximises fundraising potential.
Accessibility and inclusivity as afterthoughts	Embedding accessibility principles from the star	A more inclusive digital presence that expands reach, strengthens trust, & ensures no supporter is left behind.

## Conclusion

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### Taking the next step

**These challenges are real, but they're also solvable. Digital mobilisation success isn't about having the most expensive tools, it's about mindset and culture. Organisations that embrace testing, learning, and teams who are able to move quickly will always be better placed to adapt and grow, no matter their budget.**

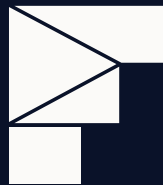
People are mobilising online every day, supporting causes, taking action, and driving conversations. It's up to your organisation to meet them where they are, attract those who share your values, and give them a meaningful role in winning the fights that matter.

The pace of change in digital is relentless, but that change also creates opportunity. By embedding digital thinking, investing in the right skills, and staying open to innovation, progressive causes can build the power they need to make a lasting impact.

This work isn't easy, but it's essential. The organisations that commit to meeting supporters with urgency, clarity, and a vision for action will be the ones that drive the change our world needs.

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If you'd like to discuss any tech challenges you're facing and how we could help, please email [hello@forwardaction.uk](mailto:hello@forwardaction.uk)



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