



## New Blackbaud Institute Research Reveals Key Gaps Social Impact Organizations Must Bridge to Achieve Transformational Results with AI

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*AI Adoption in the Social Impact Sector Is Booming, but Effectiveness Is Not; New Report Investigates Why and What Organizations Should Do Next*

CHARLESTON, S.C., June 24, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- The Blackbaud Institute, a research lab at Blackbaud (NASDAQ: BLKB), the world's leading provider of AI-powered solutions for social impact, today released new research that delivers a clear framework for intentional AI adoption to support the social impact sector's ability to maintain financial resilience, grow donor confidence, and continue responding to pressing societal needs despite constrained resources.

The report, [Bridging the AI Effectiveness Gap: New Research on What Drives AI Impact and Trust in the Social Sector](#), draws on surveys from thousands of social impact professionals and donors to identify what separates organizations that are seeing real results from AI from those that are not.

While 85% of social impact professionals report using AI at work, only about 33% believe their organization is using it very effectively. The research reveals a clear divide between a small group of "AI-Adaptive" organizations—the 10% of organizations at the top of the AI maturity scale that have moved beyond experimentation to systemic, governed AI use—and the majority of organizations that are still applying AI in fragmented, individual ways. The AI-Adaptive organizations are realizing significant dividends on their AI investment, consistently reporting stronger outcomes tied to long-term sector health, including revenue growth, donor retention and staff productivity.

This research comes at a critical time for the social impact sector with traditional fundraising models under increasing strain due to staffing shortages, high turnover and limited resources, all of which directly impact organizations' ability to sustain revenue growth.

"AI presents a transformative opportunity to fundamentally reshape social impact," said Carrie Cobb, chief data and AI officer, Blackbaud. "But this research makes it clear that adoption alone is not enough. To achieve meaningful outcomes, organizations must be intentional about grounding their AI approach in strong data, clear governance and transparency. It's about more than time and cost savings. It's about leveraging AI to position the sector for a future of sustainable growth."

### Key Findings

- **There are four key gaps that organizations should address to improve AI maturity:**
  - **The effectiveness gap:** Despite widespread use, only about 33% of professionals say AI is delivering strong organizational results, signaling a disconnect between individual experimentation and organization-wide impact.
  - **The infrastructure gap:** Adoption often outpaces readiness, with only 50% of organizations using paid or enterprise AI tools and nearly 25% relying exclusively on free versions, limiting scalability and increasing risk.
  - **The data-readiness gap:** Fewer than 20% of respondents rate their organization's data health as excellent, even though data quality is foundational to effective and responsible AI use.
  - **The transparency gap:** 71% of donors are either more comfortable or equally comfortable with the social sector using AI than for-profit companies, but transparency is key—76% of donors say it's important to understand when and how AI is used, but only 26% of organizations say they disclose this information today.
- **Time savings exist everywhere, but impact does not:**
  - The average organization saves \$500/employee/week using AI.
  - AI-Adaptive organizations save \$621/employee/week using AI and, more importantly, are reinvesting that time savings into areas that increase revenue and mission delivery, like using AI to help identify and reach new donors, better engage existing donors, reduce costs, and raise more money.
- **There's a clear AI maturity dividend:**
  - Organizations that address the four key gaps to move beyond ad hoc AI use and apply AI intentionally across the organization see compounded value.
  - That return comes not just from time savings, but from using AI to increase revenue, strengthen mission delivery and reduce risk.

### The AI Imperative for Fundraising

For fundraising teams, AI offers a path to more efficient operations, more personalized outreach and greater scale, but only if organizations [evolve how they use technology](#) and do so with trust as the foundation.

"The AI opportunity is unlike any other in the history of fundraising, but realizing it requires more than new tools," said Sudip Datta, chief product officer, Blackbaud. "The opportunity isn't just in using AI—it's in using it in ways that build trust, unlock the power of data, and drive smarter action. The future health of the social impact sector depends on organizations rethinking their technology and operating models to move up the AI maturity scale, so that AI helps reduce friction, strengthen relationships and unleash resources at the speed of need."

To support the sector in this journey, Blackbaud has convened the [AI Coalition for Social Impact](#), a collaboration of leading organizations and experts committed to removing barriers to responsible AI adoption across the social impact sector and unlocking the power of AI for good. The first initiative of

the Coalition is a [free certification program](#) for social impact professionals launching this summer.

### Read the Report

To explore the full findings and learn what distinguishes AI-Adaptive organizations from the rest of the sector, read the [Bridging the AI Effectiveness Gap report here](#).

### About the Blackbaud Institute

The Blackbaud Institute is a research lab and educational resource powered by the Blackbaud Philanthropic Dataset, the world's largest combined dataset on giving, volunteering, grantmaking, and social impact. The Institute conducts independent research and publishes insights that help organizations understand trends shaping the social impact sector and make more informed decisions. Learn more at [institute.blackbaud.com](http://institute.blackbaud.com).

### About Blackbaud

[Blackbaud](#) (NASDAQ: BLKB) is the world's leading provider of AI-powered solutions for social impact. Serving nonprofits, educational institutions, companies committed to corporate social responsibility, and individual change makers, Blackbaud propels impact at scale with the sector's most intelligent solutions for fundraising and engagement, education solutions, financial management and CSR and grantmaking. With the deepest expertise powered by the world's largest philanthropic data set, the most connected workflows, and the most powerful impact network, Blackbaud's solutions are building a future where resources are unleashed at the speed of need. Blackbaud has been recognized by Fast Company, Newsweek, Quartz, Forbes and more for AI innovation, responsible leadership and workplace excellence. Blackbaud has operations in the United States, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, India and the United Kingdom, supporting users in 100+ countries. Learn more at [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com) or follow us on [X/Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

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