



# Digital Leadership In the Not for Profit Sector

Why the next wave of impact  
starts at the top

**Thank you** to all of the contributors from across the vibrant and essential not for profit sector who gave up their time to offer their insight, experience and expertise.

# From insight to action: practical guidance for leaders driving digital change

## This is your moment

The Not for Profit sector is already deep into digital transformation. Technology, whether it's AI, data, cyber security, or new platforms, is reshaping how we fundraise, support people, and deliver services.

But digital progress isn't about tools alone. It is about leadership. The most impactful organisations are those asking the right questions, empowering thoughtful digital leaders, and creating the space to learn and adapt.

This report brings together insights from a recent event during London Tech Week and discussions with charity leaders, technologists, and digital experts. It's not a blueprint, but we hope it offers useful reflections, shared experiences, and practical prompts for leaders navigating change.

It reflects the current state of digital maturity in the sector, uneven, ambitious, and often under-resourced, while also offering a roadmap for how to move forward with confidence. It challenges leaders to think beyond tools and platforms, and to focus instead on values, inclusion, and long-term impact.

## 1. Digital is everyone's responsibility

Digital transformation can't sit with just one team anymore. It's not a project or a platform, it's a shift in how we operate, communicate, and deliver impact. From governance to fundraising to service design, digital now plays a role in nearly every decision. Some charities are already treating it as a core part of strategy.

Others are just beginning. Both are valid starting points. **The key is not where you are, but that you're moving.**

**“Digital progress is less about having the answers and more about being willing to ask the right questions.”**



### Prompt

Are we giving digital enough attention across our whole organisation, not just in tech teams?

## 2. Boards need more digital confidence

Many boards are full of deep wisdom and commitment to purpose, but often lack confidence in navigating digital risk, opportunity, or strategy. That's understandable: the pace of change can be overwhelming.

But as technology reshapes services and operations, digital is becoming a board level issue. Bringing in a trustee or advisor with digital experience, someone who can ask the right questions and offer a calm, informed voice can make a real difference.

**“It’s not about packing the board with tech experts  
it’s about ensuring someone can guide the conversation.”**



### Prompt

Do we have enough digital understanding at board level to make informed decisions?

## 3. Digital leaders need room to lead

Digital and data leads can only deliver change if they're trusted, supported, and given the space to do their jobs well. Too often, we've seen digital roles created without a clear remit or expectations that transformation will happen overnight.

The best digital leaders are collaborative, values driven, and comfortable with ambiguity. But they need air cover from senior teams, a seat at the table, and honest conversations about what is possible with the resources available.

**“Digital leadership isn’t magic  
it’s strategy, trust, and patience.”**



### Prompt

Are we giving our digital leads the clarity and support they need to succeed?

## 4. Cyber: Plan like it's already happened

Cyber security is now one of the biggest risks facing the sector. And the truth is, many of us are more vulnerable than we would like to admit.

The advice is simple: plan as if you've already been compromised. That mindset forces organisations to prepare not just in terms of firewalls and systems, but culture and recovery. Do your teams know what to do? Do you have backups? Can you keep delivering services if systems go down?

These aren't 'just IT' questions, they are leadership ones.

**"It's not a matter of if you'll be targeted - but when."**



### Prompt

If we had a breach tomorrow, would we be ready to respond clearly and confidently?

## 5. Inclusion must be intentional

Digital tools can broaden access—but only if we design with inclusion in mind. That means thinking about device access, literacy levels, lived experience, and user testing. Many charities are doing brilliant work in this space. Others are just starting. What's important is continuing to ask: Who might this exclude? What assumptions are we making?

Equity in digital services doesn't happen by accident, it happens by design.

**"Inclusive design starts with listening not assumptions."**



### Prompt

Are we designing our digital services for the broadest range of users, including those most often left out?

## 6. Data can guide impact – if we let it

Charities sit on a huge amount of data but too often it's underused or fragmented. Used well, data can help organisations understand what's working, identify unmet needs, and make the case for funding.

But data also requires care around privacy, ethics, and purpose. Boards need to treat data as a strategic issue, not just a compliance one.

**“The best use of data isn't just to prove impact  
it's to improve it.”**



### **Prompt**

Are we using data to support learning and decision making, or just to report upwards?

## 7. Mindset

Digital change isn't a destination. It's a mindset about curiosity, learning, and staying aligned with purpose as the world evolves.

Charity leaders have always adapted to change. Digital is just the latest frontier. What matters is how we lead through it with care, clarity, and humility.

Whether you are building a new team, hiring a digital trustee, or just figuring out where to start we are here to support you.

**“You don't need to have it all figured out.  
You just need to start.”**



### **Prompt**

What's one step we could take today to strengthen our digital leadership?



**We are proud to support the not for profit and wider public sector with inclusive, strategic, and impactful digital leadership.**

Our work spans across boards and executive teams, helping organisations identify and appoint digital leaders who bring a rare blend of vision, experience, and empathy.

From Digital Trustees and Chief Digital Officers to Heads of Innovation, Data Leaders, and AI Specialists, we understand what it takes to lead in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Whether you are at the beginning of your digital journey, strengthening your board, or navigating complex transformation, we are here to help.

If you are looking for expert guidance or a conversation about what's next, please get in touch with Liz Dean or Sarah Luxford below. We would be delighted to support your next step.

A portrait of Liz Dean, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark top. The background is dark red.

**Liz Dean,**  
Principal Consultant  
Not for Profit Sector  
[liz.dean@gatenbysanderson.com](mailto:liz.dean@gatenbysanderson.com)

A portrait of Sarah Luxford, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, smiling. She is wearing a patterned top. The background is dark red.

**Sarah Luxford**  
Partner  
Digital, Data & Technology  
[sarah.luxford@gatenbysanderson.com](mailto:sarah.luxford@gatenbysanderson.com)