AI for non-profits.

helping non-profits use AI well

Using AI thoughtfully: the environmental impact.

AI can be useful. It also has an environmental cost.

The aim is not to avoid it altogether. It is to use it thoughtfully, when it adds real value to the work.

Use AI on purpose.

Use generative AI when it genuinely helps. Avoid running the same request repeatedly for tiny improvements, or using AI at scale simply to experiment without a clear reason.

Every request has a cost. Use AI deliberately, rather than automatically.

Give it a clear brief.

Clear, specific prompts usually lead to better answers in fewer attempts. Bringing related questions together can also reduce repeated work.

That is better for the environment, and it saves time too.

Use text when text will do.

Creating images and video usually requires more computing power than generating text. Use rich media when it is needed, rather than because it is available.

Ask for less.

If you need a short answer, ask for one. A list, table or brief summary may be enough.

A UCL study found that, in one test setting, combining more efficient model settings with reducing prompts and responses from 300 to 150 words cut energy demand by around

75% for repetitive tasks. That will not apply in every situation. It is a useful reminder that shorter inputs and outputs can make a difference.

Ask providers better questions.

When choosing between tools, look for providers that publish clear information about energy, water and sustainability.

For workplace procurement, ask practical questions:

- Do they publish energy use per query or task?
- Do they separate direct water use from supply-chain water use?
- Do they explain renewable-energy procurement and regional data-centre impacts?
- Do they explain how they calculate and report their figures?

Better questions lead to better information. Better information helps charities make more thoughtful choices.