

The Finance AI ROI Checklist

15 practical tests before you scale AI in finance

A controller-led framework for moving from experimentation to measurable value.

MANUAL	DIGITISE	AUTOMATE	GOVERN	AGENTIC
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MAXIMUM ROI COMES FROM:

- Choosing a measurable business problem
- Redesigning the end-to-end workflow
- Making accounting logic explicit
- Embedding governance before scaling
- Measuring adoption and realised value

WHY AI ROI IS HARD TO SEE IN FINANCE:

- The baseline is often missing.
- The workflow is not redesigned.
- Accounting logic is implicit.
- Governance is added too late.
- Time savings are not automatically converted into value.

1. Confirm the business problem

- ☐ We can describe the problem without mentioning AI.
- ☐ The process creates measurable cost, delay, rework, risk, or lost capacity.
- ☐ We understand whether the root cause is people, policy, process, data, systems, controls, or capacity.
- ☐ The use case supports a defined finance or business priority.
- ☐ AI is appropriate for the problem, rather than simply available.

Complete: We are using AI to improve _____ from _____ to _____.

2. Establish the current baseline

- ☐ Current preparation and review hours are measured.
- ☐ Manual touches, rework rates, exception volumes, and resolution times are known.
- ☐ Current labour, software, outsourcing, and consulting costs are understood.
- ☐ Close delays, late journals, audit findings, or control failures are documented.
- ☐ The cost of errors, leakage, and missed opportunities has been estimated.

No baseline means no credible ROI calculation.

3. Assess process maturity

- ☐ We know whether the process is manual, digitised, automated, governed, or agentic.
- ☐ Manual knowledge and spreadsheet dependencies have been documented.
- ☐ A defined source of truth exists.
- ☐ Standard processing is separated from exceptions.
- ☐ We are not expecting AI to compensate for a missing foundational stage.

Manual -> Digitise -> Automate -> Govern -> Agentic

4. Redesign before automating

- ☐ The end-to-end workflow has been mapped.
- ☐ Duplicate entry, unnecessary approvals, and avoidable handoffs have been removed.
- ☐ Process ownership is clear from beginning to end.
- ☐ The future workflow identifies what work will stop when AI begins.
- ☐ AI is embedded in the workflow, not added as another separate step.

Automating one task does not guarantee improvement to the whole workflow.

5. Make the accounting logic explicit

- ☐ The relevant accounting policy is documented and approved.
- ☐ Recognition, measurement, classification, presentation, and materiality rules are clear.
- ☐ Judgments, thresholds, permitted treatments, and prohibited treatments are explicit.
- ☐ Evidence requirements and escalation triggers are defined.
- ☐ AI outputs will be reviewed against policy, not merely historical practice.

Accounting Policy -> SOP -> Workflow -> System Logic -> Governed AI

6. Prepare the data

- ☐ Required data sources and owners are identified.
- ☐ Data definitions and mappings are consistent across systems.
- ☐ Missing fields, duplicates, and historical-quality limitations are understood.
- ☐ Transformations are documented and traceable.
- ☐ Data preparation time is included in the ROI model.

The model may be fast. The surrounding data workflow may not be.

7. Select a high-value use case

- ☐ The use case has sufficient volume and repetition.
- ☐ It consumes meaningful preparation or review effort.
- ☐ Decision rules are reasonably clear and data is accessible.
- ☐ The outcome can be measured.
- ☐ There is a realistic path to scaling across teams, entities, or periods.

Do not choose a use case because it demos well. Choose it because solving it creates value.

8. Define the roles of AI and humans

- ☐ Each activity is classified as assist, recommend, prepare, route, execute, monitor, or escalate.
- ☐ Human review is based on risk, judgment, and materiality.
- ☐ Approval thresholds and stop-processing conditions are explicit.
- ☐ Final accountability remains clear.
- ☐ Overrides are documented and analysed.

If employees repeat the full process after AI completes it, the expected return disappears.

9. Embed governance and controls

- ☐ A named business owner is accountable for the use case.
- ☐ Access, authority limits, segregation of duties, and approval rules are configured.
- ☐ Inputs, outputs, decisions, and evidence are traceable.
- ☐ Model errors, control failures, and exceptions are monitored.
- ☐ There is a process to challenge, suspend, or change the automation.

Governance is not what slows scaling. It is what makes scaling possible.

10. Plan for adoption

- ☐ Employees understand why the process is changing.
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities have been redesigned.
- ☐ Users know the tool's limitations and how to challenge outputs.
- ☐ Employees know what work should stop.
- ☐ Usage, workarounds, and duplicate shadow processes are monitored.

Paying for AI and the old process at the same time is adoption failure.

11. Integrate into the operating environment

- ☐ The solution connects to the relevant ERP, subledger, data warehouse, or workflow.
- ☐ Excessive exporting, uploading, and copying have been removed.
- ☐ Approvals, journals, schedules, and evidence remain connected.
- ☐ Exceptions route automatically to the right owner.
- ☐ Integration failures are visible and escalated.

The objective is not one intelligent activity. It is a better end-to-end workflow.

12. Define ROI before launch

- ☐ Expected financial and operational benefits have named owners and timeframes.
- ☐ All implementation and ongoing costs are included.
- ☐ Direct and indirect benefits are captured.
- ☐ The organisation knows when it expects to break even.
- ☐ Operational outcomes will be reported alongside the ROI percentage.

ROI = (Measured Benefits - Total Costs) / Total Costs

13. Convert time savings into realised value

- ☐ Saved time is verified rather than assumed.
- ☐ The organisation knows whose capacity was released.
- ☐ Released capacity has a deliberate use.
- ☐ Senior review time shifts toward higher-risk work.
- ☐ The benefit is visible in close, reporting, quality, service, or cost metrics.

Time saved becomes value only when the organisation uses that capacity intentionally.

14. Move beyond the pilot

- ☐ The pilot has clear success criteria and uses realistic data.
- ☐ Exceptions, controls, security, and operating conditions are tested.
- ☐ Users outside the project team participate.
- ☐ There is a clear decision point to scale, revise, or stop.
- ☐ A production owner and budget have been identified.

A pilot proves capability. Production proves repeatable organisational value.

15. Monitor value continuously

- ☐ Actual results are compared with the baseline.
- ☐ Benefits, usage, accuracy, exceptions, and manual interventions are reviewed regularly.
- ☐ Overrides and integration failures are analysed for recurring patterns.
- ☐ The control environment is reassessed as automation expands.
- ☐ Low-value use cases are redesigned or stopped; successful capabilities are reused.

AI ROI must be governed like any other business investment.

AI ROI Scorecard

Give the initiative one point for every “Yes”.

- ☐ The business problem is clearly defined.
- ☐ A measurable baseline exists.
- ☐ The process has been redesigned.
- ☐ Accounting rules are explicit.
- ☐ Data is accessible and reliable.
- ☐ Ownership is clear.
- ☐ AI is embedded in the end-to-end workflow.
- ☐ Human and AI responsibilities are defined.
- ☐ Governance and controls are operational.
- ☐ Employee adoption is measurable.
- ☐ The solution is integrated with core systems.
- ☐ Benefits and costs are fully quantified.
- ☐ Released capacity has a defined use.
- ☐ There is a credible path from pilot to scale.
- ☐ Value will be monitored continuously.

13-15	READY TO SCALE
9-12	PROMISING, BUT EXPOSED
5-8	PILOT WITH CAUTION
0-4	REDESIGN BEFORE INVESTING

The CFO final readiness test

- ☐ What specific problem are we solving?
- ☐ What is the current cost or impact?
- ☐ Where is the process on the maturity journey?
- ☐ Which limitations must be fixed first?
- ☐ What work will disappear?

AI cannot leapfrog the maturity of the finance operating model. It inherits it.

- ☐ What outcome should improve?
- ☐ Who owns the result?
- ☐ What may AI decide or execute?
- ☐ What must remain under human judgment?
- ☐ How will we prove value was realised?

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT PROBLEM. FIX THE PROCESS. MAKE THE RULES
EXPLICIT. PREPARE THE DATA. EMBED GOVERNANCE. MEASURE THE
RESULT. THEN SCALE.**