

Finance strategy · AI and automation

Start your Finance AI strategy with the work

Choose the Finance result you need, compare the ways to achieve it and give the first stage a realistic scope. Keep the longer roadmap visible while you work out what can start.

What you finish with: A first-stage strategy brief with the business result, options, ownership, capacity, evidence and next decision recorded, connected to the wider Finance roadmap.

[Read this guide online](#)

FINANCE STRATEGY / FIRST STAGE

01 Business result

The task, user, baseline and result you need.

02 Options and conditions

Process, existing tools and AI; evidence, people and authority.

03 A stage that fits

Confirmed effort and dependencies; work deferred stays on the roadmap.

The next review decides the next scope. A plan is not permission to release AI.

01 Choose the result before the technology

Start with a Finance decision or service that matters to the organization: a forecast people can use, a close with fewer unresolved items, timely cash visibility or a better investment decision. Describe the problem in the words of the people doing and using the work. Ask what happens today, what goes wrong and what a better result would let someone do.

Write the current measure, its definition, period and source. If there is no reliable baseline, establishing one is part of the first stage. A target without an agreed measure gives the team little basis for judging progress. Keep different outcomes separate: a faster draft, an accurate forecast, lower cash spend and better adoption need different evidence.

02 Find out what the organization can already do

Ask which entities and Finance processes are in scope, which systems and contracts support them, and where data comes from. Have the people who use the process walk through a normal case, a correction and an exception. Record manual handoffs, duplicated work, controls that must remain and the source used when figures disagree.

Compare a process change, configuration of the existing system, ordinary rules or RPA, and AI assistance. Retaining the ERP is compatible with improving a task around it. Check actual licensed features, access, integration and support before proposing another product. Record whether a capability was demonstrated, needs configuration, depends on an extra purchase or remains unproven.

03 Keep the roadmap broad and the first stage deliverable

Keep one roadmap for the work ahead: strategy and priorities; data and process requirements; people and responsibilities; evaluation; design and testing; preparation for use; release; and improvement after release. Give each activity an owner, an output, an effort estimate, prerequisites and a decision point. A shorter first-stage plan should identify what remains on that roadmap and why it waits.

Add effort in the same unit and period. If a two-week window has 24 total team-hours and the proposed work needs 32, there is an eight-hour gap. Reordering tasks does not create those hours. Reduce or defer a named activity, extend the window or obtain confirmed capacity from the person who controls it. Check dependencies before moving work; a later activity cannot finish before its required input exists.

A review can authorize the next investigation without authorizing implementation. Define the evidence needed for an initial AI use, who can accept it and what happens if it fails. A non-AI improvement may proceed on its own merits, but it does not demonstrate that an AI stage is ready. Dates remain conditional until scope, effort, inputs and people are confirmed.

04 Put value, authority and people in the same decision

Ask the accountable Finance leader to confirm the intended result and the people who hold the relevant permissions. Distinguish permission to investigate from permission to access data, spend money, change records or release a service. Bring in technology, data, security, legal, procurement and people leaders for the decisions that affect their responsibilities. Assignments need confirmed skills and time as well as a name.

Show one-off cash costs, recurring cash costs and internal effort separately. State currency, period, included costs and assumptions. Hours released, valued at a labor rate, describe possible capacity value; they are not cash savings unless an actual budget change supports that claim. Test the important assumptions one at a time, including lower hours released or higher recurring charges. Do not turn a capacity estimate into an ROI or funding approval.

05 Test the work people will actually use

Agree on the permitted inputs, representative tasks, awkward cases, expected result and review criteria before testing. Include correction of an answer, a changed fact, saving the result, leaving and returning, and taking the record into the meeting where it will be used. Record failures and incomplete work with the successes; an unreviewed result is still unreviewed.

Prepare the people and operating arrangements: practice time, task-specific guidance, support, access, exception handling and the route back if the new way cannot be used. Choose a next review with a clear decision: continue within the boundary, change the scope, resolve a missing condition or stop. A completed form, successful demonstration or training attendance does not by itself establish routine use or permission to expand.

Example strategy brief

A first stage for forecast preparation

A Finance team wants more timely explanations of forecast changes. The ERP stays. It has 24 total team-hours over two weeks to prepare a proposal for its existing investment review.

Result and baseline:

Seek a more useful variance explanation with traceable figures and less total preparation and correction effort. Measure today's effort and agree on the quality criteria first. No improvement or saving has been established.

Options:

Compare a clearer common template, configuration in the existing planning application, and AI-assisted preparation using permitted information. Confirm what the current agreement includes before assuming that an AI feature is available.

Capacity and sequence:

The proposed work needs 32 hours. Allocate eight hours to process and baseline evidence, six to checking existing capabilities, six to data and authority requirements, and four to the leadership brief: 24 hours. Defer the separate eight-hour hands-on evaluation. Its output remains a prerequisite for a later AI release decision.

Decision now:

Ask the Finance leader to confirm the first-stage scope and the people whose time and authority are needed. The investment review considers the evidence and decides whether to fund the evaluation. It does not approve AI production use.

What follows:

The roadmap retains evaluation, design, testing, team preparation, controlled release and improvement. Each needs its own outputs and acceptance. Keep current work in place until the appropriate owners accept a replacement.

Your working record

FINANCE AI STRATEGY BRIEF

Field	Your record
Business result / decision or service to improve:	
Process, entities and users in scope:	
Current measure / definition / baseline / period / source:	
Current systems / licensed capabilities / ERP boundary:	
Options to compare, including process and existing tools:	
Required data / permitted use / missing inputs / owner:	
Wider roadmap activities / outputs / dependencies:	
First-stage work / effort unit and period / confirmed capacity:	
Work deferred / reason / consequence / condition for return:	
One-off cash costs / recurring cash costs / currency / period:	
Internal effort and capacity value, separately from cash savings:	
Key assumptions / one-at-a-time sensitivities / evidence missing:	
Business owner / permissions to confirm / review participants:	
Test tasks / quality and effort criteria / exception and return path:	
Team practice / support / time released / owner:	
Next decision / evidence required / approver / review date:	

[Open the guide to copy this record into your team's document](#)

Related reading

[Choose the Finance problem to address first](#)

Use the readiness checks to compare your candidates before committing the first stage.