

White Paper

# FinOps Maturity Playbook

How the Right FinOps  
Tool Powers the Crawl–  
Walk–Run Journey



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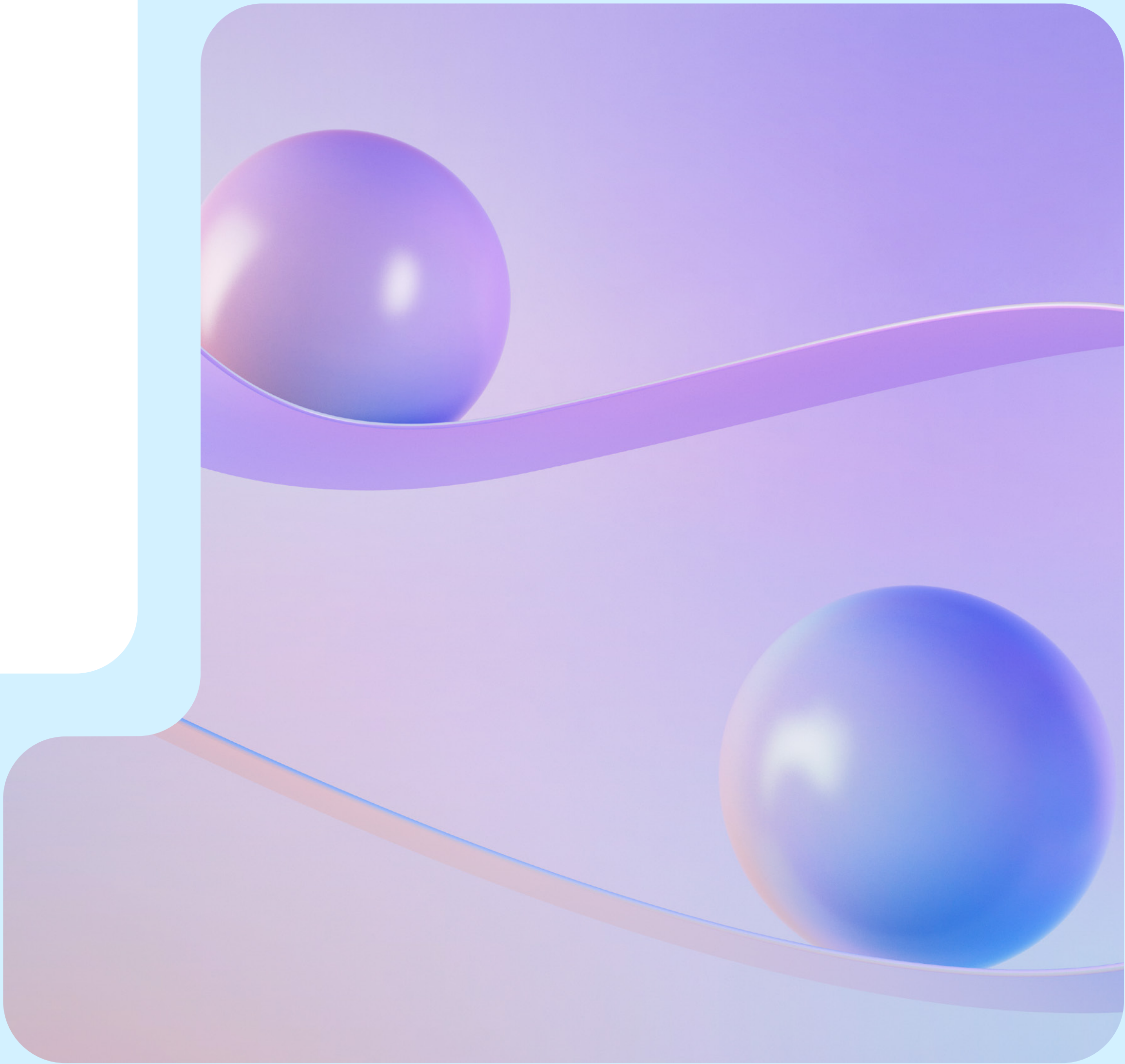
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# Introduction

Controlling cloud spending is a constant challenge for enterprises. You've likely already explored native tools from AWS, Azure, Google Cloud or even developed your own homegrown solutions. But at some point, these tools hit their limits. Visibility is incomplete, processes are manual, and your teams are stuck in reactive mode.

You know you need a dedicated **FinOps tool** to move forward. A solution that goes beyond cost tracking and supports you at every step of your FinOps journey—from early awareness to full optimization.

This guide introduces you to the **FinOps Maturity Model**, a proven framework that helps you progress through the crawl, walk and run stages. We'll show you how enterprises like yours can build on existing efforts, overcome common barriers and achieve cloud cost management excellence. Whether you're a cloud architect, a finance lead, or a CIO, this guide will help you understand where you are and how to move forward.



# The FinOps Maturity Model

The **FinOps Maturity Model** is your roadmap to scalable, data-driven cloud cost management. It helps you structure your financial operations, improve visibility and develop practices that evolve with your business.

Each stage—crawl, walk and run—represents a step forward in cloud financial management, with clear actions you can take to advance. Whether you’re starting with spreadsheets or fine-tuning your automation, this model gives you a path to success.

FinOps Maturity Model		
Crawl	Walk	Run
Limited visibility into cloud spending	Fragmented collaboration across team	Hard to manage real-time cloud costs
No clear accountability across teams	Inconsistent or incomplete cost data	Missing advanced automation and AI
Manual tracking with basic tools like spreadsheets	Complex budgeting and forecasting	Difficult to align costs with business goals
Native cloud tools don't provide enough control	Manual processes slow optimization	Cloud unit economics are hard to track



# Stage 1: Crawl

In the crawl stage, you're starting to recognize that cloud costs are growing fast. You've probably seen this through rising bills or the realization that current tracking methods just aren't enough. You might be using basic reports or spreadsheets to track spending, but there's limited visibility and little financial accountability across teams.

## Typical challenges

- Limited or manual tracking of cloud expenses
- No clear understanding of cost drivers
- Frustration with escalating costs
- Native tools from hyperscalers are falling short

At this stage, organizations know cloud costs are a problem—but they're just starting to address it.

## Cloud is expensive—what's next?

You need to move quickly from recognizing the problem to building cost awareness across your teams.

Start tracking cloud expenses consistently and get everyone focused on responsible cloud use.



### Next step

Begin with basic reporting and cost tracking. Use this stage to build your FinOps foundation.

## Introduce basic FinOps practices

FinOps practices help you build financial accountability, improve cloud cost visibility and create a sustainable, cost-efficient cloud strategy.

- Start tagging your cloud resources for cost allocation
- Assign cloud spending to departments or projects
- Develop initial budgets—even if they're rough estimates
- Build simple governance guidelines to prevent overspending

As you track spending, you'll also find that many enterprises can reduce costs right away by adopting **BYOL (Bring Your Own License)** strategies instead of using default cloud pricing.

### Common pitfalls in the crawl stage

- Incomplete or inaccurate data
- Resistance from teams unfamiliar with cloud financial management
- Resource constraints—both in people and expertise



### Level up

To reach the walk stage, you'll need to improve your reporting, automate cost tracking where possible and encourage finance, IT and business teams to work together on cloud spending decisions.



## Allocate your cloud costs properly

Managing and allocating native tagging systems from various cloud technologies can be complex and frustrating. Inconsistent tags across platforms, like an AWS resource labeled “Team A” corresponding to “Team Alpha” in Snowflake, lead to confusion and inefficiency. Additionally, native tagging lacks retroactive application, leaving historical data fragmented and obscured.

A tool like **USU FinOps** provides the **Virtual Tagging** function to easily set up tags live and allocate costs exactly where they belong in real-time. You can even drill down to the Pod level in Kubernetes. Spot and fix incorrectly tagged resources and enable internal chargeback processes that keep spending transparent and fair across your teams.



### Next step

Look for quick wins using **cloud cost management** tools that go beyond native platforms. These third-party solutions can help you uncover hidden savings and give you better cost visibility from the start.

## Stage 2: Walk

You've moved beyond basic tracking and started introducing structured FinOps processes. In the walk stage, your focus shifts from visibility to proactive cost management.

You now understand where your cloud costs are coming from—and you're ready to optimize.

### Key actions in the walk stage

- Implement reserved instances and savings plans
- Rightsize cloud resources to prevent overprovisioning
- Set approval processes for resource scaling

### Cost allocation and showback

At this level, automation becomes essential. Enterprises in the walk stage start using detailed tagging and automated reporting to allocate costs accurately across teams. Showback reporting helps business units understand their cloud spending and drives financial accountability.

### Next steps

A third-party tool like **USU FinOps** can streamline your cost management processes and ensure that commitment-based savings keep delivering value over time.

Fine-tune your cost allocation practices, establish governance frameworks and ensure your teams are aligned with cloud financial management goals.



## Common challenges

- Collaboration across finance, IT and business teams is often fragmented
- Inconsistent data from multiple sources makes cost analysis difficult
- Manual processes still dominate, slowing down decision-making
- Some teams resist change or rely on outdated cost management methods



### Watch out

Adding too many tools or metrics at once can overwhelm your teams. Keep your processes streamlined and avoid analysis paralysis.

## Budgeting and forecasting

This is the stage where budgeting moves from guesswork to a real management tool. Build budgets by department, project or application and use past data to forecast future spending. With the right **FinOps tool**, you can monitor actual costs against your forecasts and adjust quickly.

### Level up

To transition to the run stage, start automating financial management tasks, build real-time dashboards and fully align your FinOps practices with your broader business strategy.

## Stage 3: Run

The run stage represents a mature FinOps organization. Here, your cloud financial management is fully automated, integrated with your business strategy and focused on continuous optimization.

### Advanced cost optimization strategies

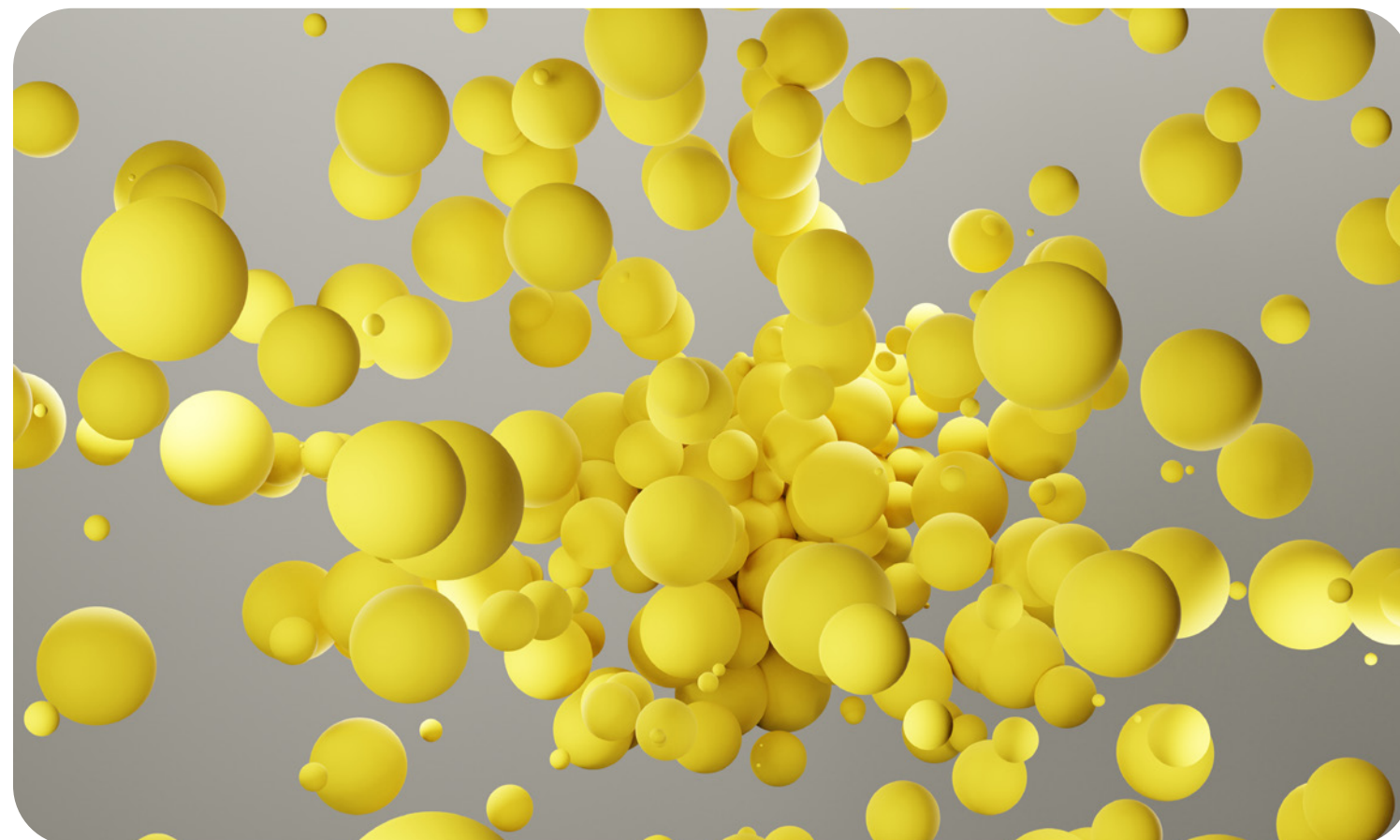
- Dynamic auto-scaling based on real-time demand
- Using spot instances for non-critical workloads
- Rightsizing cloud resources continuously
- Leveraging containerization and serverless computing to maximize efficiency

#### Next step

Invest in **AI-powered tools** for anomaly detection, predictive cost forecasting and policy-driven automation to reduce manual effort.

### Real-time monitoring and automation

This is where **cloud cost management** becomes a strategic advantage. Automated policies can scale resources up or down, decommission unused services and flag cost anomalies instantly. Real-time dashboards help your teams stay ahead of overspending and spot trends before they become issues.





## Full business alignment

At this level, **FinOps** is no longer just a process—it's part of your company's DNA. Cloud financial management is fully aligned with your business goals, and everyone understands how cloud spending connects to the company's success.

### Key success drivers in the run stage:

- Strategic alignment between cloud spending and business priorities
- Value-based decision-making
- Ongoing refinement of FinOps practices

### Next step

Deepen your partnership with **FinOps consulting** experts to benchmark performance, fine-tune your automation and stay ahead of industry trends.

## Cloud unit economics

In the run stage, you can calculate cloud costs per customer, per product or per transaction. This level of detail helps you fine-tune pricing, improve profitability and make smarter cloud investment decisions.

### Success metrics to track:

- Cost efficiency (planned vs. actual spending)
- Resource utilization rates
- Financial accountability by team or project
- Business value driven by cloud investments

### Level up

Continue to innovate, scale your automation and regularly benchmark your FinOps performance to keep pushing your maturity forward.

# Conclusion

Most enterprises start their FinOps journey with native or homegrown tools—but these quickly reach their limits. To succeed, you need a purpose-built FinOps tool that grows with you and delivers real, measurable impact.

We’re here to help. Our cloud cost management platform, **USU FinOps** and expert FinOps consulting support you at every step—from the crawl stage to the run stage and beyond.

**When you work with us, you can:**

- Align your cloud cost management with business goals
- Automate and streamline cloud financial operations
- Optimize your cloud investments with full **BYOL** support
- Build a culture of continuous FinOps improvement

Let’s take your FinOps journey to the next level—together.

Book a meeting

**Mission: Reducing Cloud Costs with FinOps**

See how USU used FinOps to optimize our own multi-cloud costs

Webinar On-Demand







## About USU

We help enterprises master cloud cost management with smart tools, flexible services and expert guidance. Whether you're crawling, walking or running, we've got the right FinOps solutions to help you advance with confidence.

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