Australian AI Automation Pilot ROI Methodology

How to estimate payback before a full rollout using conservative assumptions

Direct answer: how to estimate ROI for a pilot

Estimate pilot ROI by measuring current manual hours, error/rework rates, and throughput delays for one workflow, then apply conservative automation savings (20-40%) and compare against the pilot cost over 90-180 days. Start with one process, not a full transformation model.

What to measure before any automation build

1. Monthly process volume (requests, forms, invoices, tickets, etc.)
2. Average handling time per item (minutes)
3. Rework rate and escalation rate
4. Time-to-completion / cycle time delays
5. Who must approve or review output
6. Current software stack (M365, Teams, Outlook, Xero/MYOB, CRM, inboxes, file stores)

> **Method rule**
>
> Use observed numbers from the last 4-8 weeks, not best-case guesses.

Pilot ROI formula (conservative)

Use this baseline equation for a 30-60 day pilot and 90-180 day payback review.

Metric	Formula	Notes
Monthly hours saved	Volume x Time per item x % reduction	Use 20-40% reduction for first pilot estimates
Monthly labor value (AUD)	Hours saved x loaded hourly cost	Include wages, super, on-costs, and reviewer time
Rework savings	Reduced errors x avg rework time x hourly cost	Only include measurable rework
Pilot ROI	(90-180 day value - pilot cost) / pilot cost	Review after pilot stabilizes

Example workflow model: intake and triage

Input	AU example	Conservative automation assumption
Monthly submissions	850 intake emails/forms	Use recent 30-day average
Current handling time	7 minutes each	Measure across 20-30 samples
Automation savings	30% handling-time reduction	Pilot target for classification + routing
Human review	100% on exceptions, sampled on routine items	Keep approvals in place during pilot
Outcome to track	Faster routing + fewer missed follow-ups across teams	Tie to service-level target

What a 30-60 day pilot should include

Week 1: process and baseline

- Workflow map, exceptions, and approvals documented
- Success metrics agreed (hours, turnaround, error rate)
- Privacy/compliance and data handling constraints confirmed

Weeks 2-4: build and test

- Automation inside existing tools where possible
- Human-in-the-loop checkpoints for all high-risk actions
- Exception handling and rollback path documented

Weeks 5-8: supervised rollout

- Limited-volume rollout and performance review
- Metric review against baseline
- Scale / stop / redesign decision based on evidence

What not to do when calculating pilot ROI

- Do not assume 80-100% automation on the first pilot
- Do not count "strategic value" if you cannot explain the math
- Do not ignore reviewer time and exception handling
- Do not compare pilot cost to a full-year fantasy scenario

Next step

Use this methodology to score one workflow, then book a pilot scoping session. If you want a faster start, use our What to Automate First scorecard before your consultation. AU teams should also define who signs off on exception handling during the pilot.