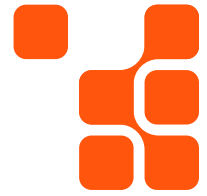


The Data Readiness Index: Maximizing AI Value in Financial Services



Introduction

From credit scoring and risk modeling to algorithmic trading and fraud detection, data is the foundation on which financial services firms operate. Today, artificial intelligence (AI) is accelerating that foundation into something far more dynamic. Financial institutions are leveraging AI to detect fraud in real time, personalize customer experiences, automate compliance processes, and optimize investment strategies.

Like many other industries, financial services operate under intense regulatory scrutiny, where data accuracy and governance are legal requirements that go beyond mere operational concerns. The regulations and risks associated with this industry mean that organizations must move quickly to compete in an AI-driven market while maintaining absolute control over their data.

According to [The Data Readiness Index 2026](#), more than half of enterprises (57%) report that their data-driven initiatives are hindered because they cannot access 100% of the data across their environments. For financial institutions, where a fragmented view of their data can mean missed fraud signals, risk exposure, or customer friction, this gap is especially critical.

So, what does data readiness really look like in financial services, and what's standing in the way of it?

Data Readiness Across the Financial Services Landscape

Financial institutions manage a complex data environment. Transactional systems, trading platforms, customer data, third-party feeds, and governance, risk, and compliance platforms all generate massive, continuous streams of information.

As AI adoption accelerates, many organizations are increasing cloud investments to support advanced analytics and scalability. In fact, 77% of financial services firms plan to increase cloud spend by a significant or moderate amount in the near term.

But in this industry, data readiness is all about control. Regulatory requirements and data privacy laws impose strict constraints on how data can be used at any stage of the process, from access to use.

Encouragingly, 83% of organizations report full visibility into where their data resides, and 89% say their data sources are mostly or fully integrated across different systems and environments. These capabilities are critical for enabling use cases such as real-time fraud detection, anti-money laundering (AML) monitoring, and the delivery of personalized financial products. Each of these use cases depends on integrating and analyzing diverse data streams instantly and securely.

However, visibility and connectivity do not equate to readiness. In practice, risk decisions require complete data that is accurate and accessible in real time, and any gap in quality can introduce uncertainty into critical decisions.

And in financial services, uncertainty is risk.



In financial services, every decision is a risk decision. Institutions need a unified view across structured and unstructured sources to see the full picture.

As AI becomes more autonomous, the margin for error shrinks. Financial institutions need governed, high-quality data to ensure those systems act in predictable and compliant ways."

JACOB BENGTSON

56%

cite complicated access requirements as a barrier to effective collaboration, preventing teams from sharing, managing, and using data.

9%

Only 9% of financial service organizations' data is fully governed.

Barriers to Progress and the Growing Importance of Governance

Despite progress, many financial institutions struggle to operationalize their data in ways that fully support AI-driven risk management. This is especially important in environments that span both structured and unstructured data, where inconsistencies across formats can introduce risk into AI-driven decisions. Over three-fourths of respondents (78%) report that their data-driven initiatives are hindered because they cannot access 100% of the data they need across environments. This lack of access creates blind spots where fraud can go undetected or compliance issues can emerge. At the same time, data quality remains a persistent challenge. Nearly one in five organizations (19%) say data quality issues have directly led to poor ROI on AI and analytics investments.

The urgency around governance is also being shaped by evolving risk and AI demands. In fact, 27% of organizations cite agentic AI as a primary driver for data governance in 2026, followed closely by 26% who point to data analytics, visualization, and reporting. As AI systems take on more autonomous roles, the need for well-governed, high-quality data becomes critical to avoid unintended outcomes and manage risk effectively. In financial services, poor data quality is a governance failure with real financial and regulatory consequences, yet governance maturity remains uneven. Only 9% of organizations report that all of their data is fully governed, while 28% say most of it is. This suggests that many institutions are operating with partial control over the very data they rely on to manage risk. Without strong governance frameworks covering lineage, accuracy, access controls, and compliance, organizations cannot fully trust their data. And without trust, AI-driven risk models lose credibility and effectiveness.

The result is a paradox: institutions invest heavily in advanced analytics to reduce risk, while underlying data gaps continue to introduce it.

Defining Ownership: Leadership Accountability and Alignment

Modern infrastructure is imperative to achieving data readiness, but equally important are strong organizational alignment and clear accountability. Most institutions recognize this. Eighty-seven percent report having a clearly defined data strategy aligned to broader business objectives, with 31% saying this alignment is extremely strong. These strategies often center on key priorities such as risk management, regulatory compliance, customer experience, and digital transformation.

Leadership engagement is also high, with 91% indicating that senior leaders understand and prioritize the data infrastructure needed to support AI at scale. However, responsibility for execution is typically concentrated among a small group of leaders. The CIO or CTO is most often accountable (58%), followed by the Chief Data Officer (18%) and Chief AI Officer (18%).

In a highly regulated and functionally complex industry, this concentration of responsibility emphasizes the importance of strong alignment. Data readiness spans multiple domains, including risk, compliance, IT, operations, and customer experience, each with its own priorities and constraints. Establishing shared ownership and cross-functional collaboration is essential to ensure that strategies are executed effectively and that the organization builds a solid foundation for true data readiness.

True readiness requires breaking down silos and embedding data accountability across the organization, not just within technical leadership.

Advancing Data Readiness in Financial Services

Financial services is entering a new era, one where AI has the potential to redefine how institutions serve customers and compete in the market. There is strong confidence in the path ahead. Over the next two to three years, 92% of organizations believe their current data infrastructure can support their strategic priorities.

But in an industry where trust is paramount, confidence must be matched by capability. To fully realize the value of AI, financial institutions must strengthen the foundations of data readiness by turning their focus to strengthening data accuracy, governance, and real-time usability. This includes investing in unified data architectures, modern governance frameworks, and technologies that enable secure, compliant data sharing across environments.

Organizations that can close the gap between data potential and actual implementation will be best equipped to lead in a rapidly evolving, data-driven financial environment.

Discover how to achieve [data readiness](#) in financial services and connect with an expert to learn more.

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