



Microsoft Support Procurement Guide

A practical framework to evaluate
Microsoft support providers, reduce
risk, and strengthen outcomes.

INDEPENDENT THINKING.
BETTER MICROSOFT OUTCOMES.

Executive Overview

Microsoft support is often renewed alongside licensing, Azure, or enterprise-agreement activity.

That convenience can obscure a distinct sourcing decision with its own economics, service requirements, contract dependencies, and operational risks. This guide helps procurement and technology leaders compare Microsoft Unified, partner-delivered, independent, and hybrid support models against the same enterprise requirements.

Core Evaluation Principles

- Evaluate Microsoft support as a separate sourcing decision—not an automatic extension of licensing or Azure commitments.
- Compare every model against the same documented requirements, evidence, and three- to five-year cost assumptions.
- Start early enough to validate technical capability, contract rights, security, references and transition readiness.
- Select the model that best aligns with business impact,

RESEARCH LENS

“Software is the **second-highest** IT spend category.”

Source: Gartner, *Market Guide for*

What the Guide Covers

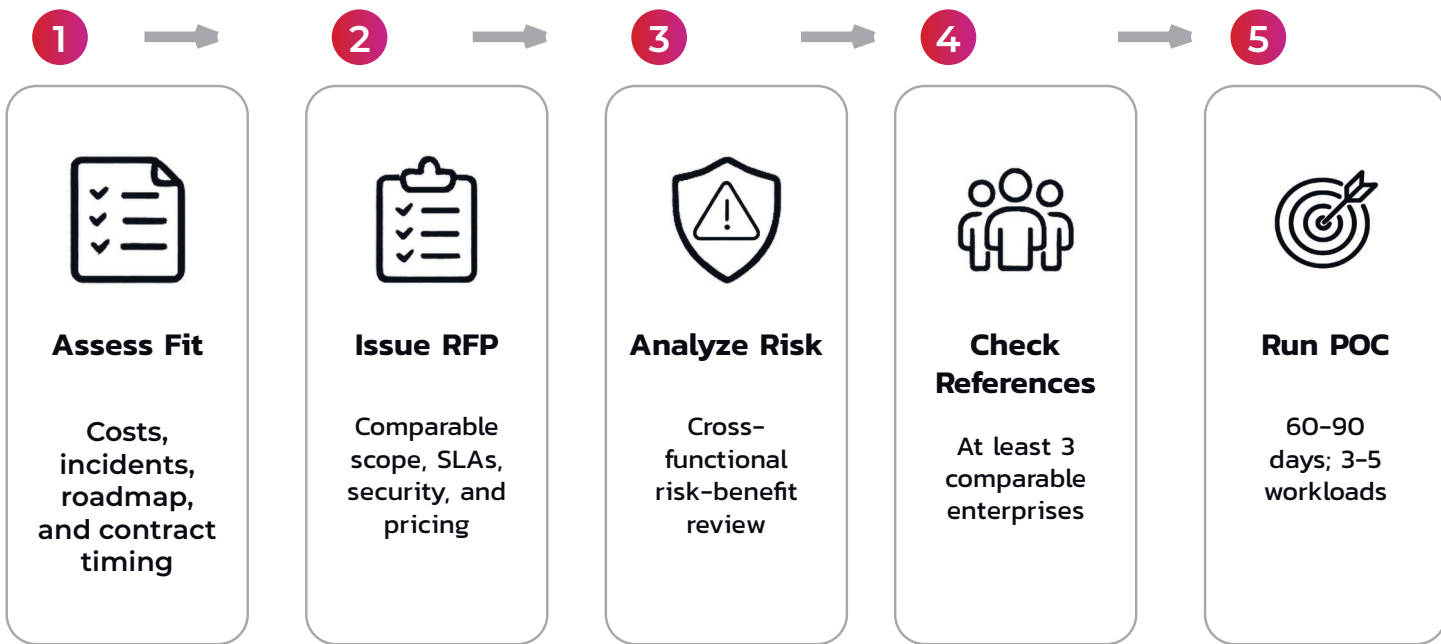
- ▷ Five-Step Evaluation
- ▷ Support Landscape, Fit, & Renewal Timing
- ▷ Current State Inventory & Historical Value
- ▷ Environment Coverage & Future-State Roadmap
- ▷ Service Scope, Engineering, & Microsoft Escalation
- ▷ SLAs, Outage Impact, & Support Operations
- ▷ Security, Privacy, & Supply-Chain Risk
- ▷ Entitlements, Licensing, Audit, & Cancellation Risk
- ▷ Pricing, Commercial Paths & Technology Cost Governance
- ▷ RFP, References, Proof of Concept, & Transition
- ▷ Scoring, Red Flags, & Final Decision

Five-Step Evaluation

A structured process prevents incumbent familiarity, first-year price, or broad service claims from becoming the default decision criteria. Each step should produce a documented output that can be reviewed across procurement, IT, security, legal, finance, ITAM/SAM, and executive stakeholders.

Use these five steps to compare support options and make your final decision based on evidence, not assumptions.

5-Step Evaluation



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“Among purchases of customer service and support technology last year, 72% resulted in high or moderate buyer’s regret.”

Source: Gartner, *2026 Technology Trends for Customer Service and Support*

MARKET SIGNAL

“By year-end 2028, market share for third-party providers of Microsoft support will be 25%, up from 15% in 2023.”

Source: Gartner, *Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services*

Support Landscape, Fit, & Renewal Timing

No single support model is right for every enterprise. Compare required outcomes, ownership, escalation mechanics, total cost and risk.

Support Model

Model	Microsoft Relationship	Typical Value	Key Question
Microsoft Unified Support	Direct	Native Microsoft access	Is cost proportionate to value?
Partner-Delivered	Authorized/partner	Broader services & escalation	Who delivers and owns the case?
Independent	Provider-specific	Cost flexibility & engineering access	How is Microsoft engaged?
Hybrid	Mixed	Specialized or transitional coverage	Are boundaries and ownership clear?

When to Evaluate Alternatives

- Cloud or platform migration
 - End-of-support exposure
 - Low-value maintenance or low incident volume
- M&A, divestiture, or restructuring
 - Missing or expiring price protection
 - Stable systems and a need to control modernization timing

Timeline



Current-State Inventory & Historical Value

A defensible comparison starts with an accurate picture of the current model: what the enterprise pays, what is covered, how support is used, where internal effort is required, and which recurring problems remain unresolved.

Current-State Inventory

- Agreement, renewal, & notice dates
- Covered & excluded workloads
- 12-24 months of tickets by product & severity
- Internal coordination labor
- Annual fee, increases, & pricing formula
- Support hours, severity definitions, & escalation rights
- Supplemental consulting & after-hours spend
- Unused benefits & unresolved recurring issues

Historical Ticket Value Analysis

Allocate current support cost across major workloads, then compare that cost with ticket volume, critical-case frequency, and outcome quality.

Workload	Allocated Cost	Total # Tickets	Critical Cases	Outcome Quality	Value Finding
Microsoft 365					
Azure & Infrastructure					
Security & Identity					
Business Applications					

Historical Case Replay



Select Cases

Choose a mix of critical outage, cross-workload, recurring, Microsoft-only, and legacy issues.

Replay with Providers

Require each provider to explain assignment, diagnosis, escalation, & restoration.

Compare & Score

Score on speed, quality, coordination & ownership, identify gaps & improvements.

Environment Coverage & Future-State

Support coverage should reflect the complete Microsoft environment, not only the products on the current order form. Evaluate cross-workload dependencies and the architecture the enterprise expects to operate during the contract term.

Coverage Inventory

- Microsoft 365 & collaboration
- Entra ID/Active Directory
- Defender, Sentinel, & Purview
- Power Platform & Dynamics 365
- Legacy products, multiple tenants, & third-party integrations
- Azure & hybrid infrastructure
- Intune & endpoint management
- Windows Server, SQL Server, & System Center
- Copilot & Microsoft AI services

Workload	Criticality	Current Coverage	Future Requirement	Gap
Microsoft 365				
Azure & Hybrid				
Security & Identity				
Endpoints & Devices				
Apps & Data Platforms				
Integrations & Partners				

Future-State Prompts



Azure migrations & data modernization to improve resiliency & scalability.



Copilot & Power Platform growth to drive productivity & automation.



AI security & governance to manage risk, access, & compliance.



Microsoft Fabric & AI platforms to unify data, analytics, & AI.



Multi cloud & hybrid integration across platforms & regions.



Legacy retirement, mergers, or divestitures & portfolio rationalization.

Service Scope & Microsoft Escalation

Don't assume that every proposal uses the same definition of support. Separate required reactive support from additional capabilities. Use the chart below to document service scope.

Service-Scope Comparison

Capability	Required?	Included?	Extra Cost?	Evidence
24/7 Reactive Support				
Cross-Workload Troubleshooting				
Critical-Incident Management				
Microsoft Escalation Management				
Security/Performance Guidance				
Health Checks & Advisory				
Migration/Project Assistance				

Engineering & Ownership

- Define L2/L3/L4 access & architect access
- Clarify employee, contractor, and subcontractor delivery
- Document Microsoft-only cases, escalation mechanism, limits, & cost
- Require representative resumes, certifications, & shift coverage
- Assign one owner through restoration, Microsoft escalation, & post-incident follow-up

80%

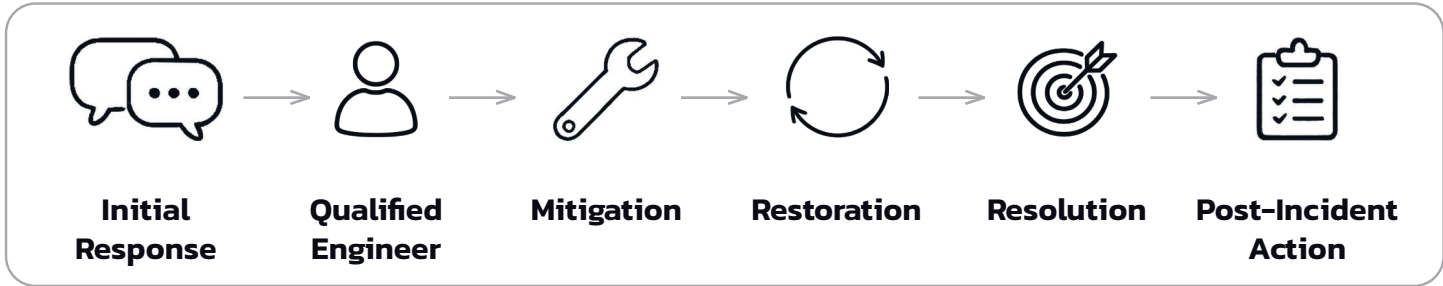
of recent Gartner inquiries about Microsoft support indicated **dissatisfaction** due to support quality, price, or both.

Source: Gartner, *Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services*

SLAs, Outage Impact, & Support Operations

Initial response measures acknowledgment. It does not show how quickly qualified engineering begins, business impact is reduced, or service is restored. Define and measure each stage separately in the chart below.

SLA Ladder



Initial Response
Mitigation
Resolution

Business & Operating Metrics

- Maximum tolerable downtime & estimated impact per hour
- First-contact resolution, reopen rate, & escalation rate
- Knowledge reuse, recurring problem reduction, & corrective action
- Users, customers, revenue, & regulatory exposure
- Backlog, case aging, satisfaction, & customer effort
- Capacity & availability of support resources

Security, Privacy, & Supply-Chain Risk

Support providers become part of the enterprise technology supply chain. Evaluate the security of their people, access methods, portals, collaboration tools, file-transfer systems, remote-support technology, and Microsoft escalation workflow.

Control Areas

- Least privilege & access approval
- Remote-support controls
- Data residency & retention
- Subcontractor & fourth-party disclosure
- Vulnerability remediation timelines
- Privileged-session monitoring
- Diagnostic-file encryption
- Ticketing & file-transfer platforms
- Security-incident notification
- Business continuity & disaster recovery

Third-Party/Supply-Chain Review

Ticket Portal
Remote Session
Microsoft Escalation

RESEARCH LENS

"Organizations should consider taking steps to include the impact and influence of their third parties in any plans of operational and cyber resilience."

Source: Verison, 2026 Breach Impact Study

48%

of breaches involved a third party, a 60% year-over-year increase. Software vulnerabilities were the initial entry point in 31% of breaches.

Source: Verizon, 2026 Data Breach Investigations Report

Entitlements, Licensing, & Cancellation Risk

Ending or restructuring support can affect rights to versions, updates, downloads, keys, portals, documentation, support-dependent tools, and escalation services. Document what the enterprise retains, loses, and must replace.

Entitlement Review



Installed version & last entitled version



Security information, portals, & documentation



Updates, downloads, keys, & archived media



Tools or use rights dependent on continuing support



Replacement or mitigation for every lost entitlement



Legal & software asset management sign off

Audit & Partial-Cancellation Gate

Product	Entitlement Confirmed?	Cancellation Permitted?	Audit Risk	Action
Licenses & Subscriptions				
Deployments & Usage				
Rights & Agreements				
Support-Linked Entitlements				
Data & Content				

“Understand the versions you are entitled to have and use upon cancellation.”

Source: Forrester, *The Current State of Independent Third-Party Software Support*

RESEARCH LENS

36%

of organizations report complete visibility into their IT assets and their impact on business outcomes.

Source: Flexera, *2026 State of ITAM Report*

Pricing & Technology Cost Governance

Compare the complete three-to-five-year economic outcome, not just the first-year base fee. A lower annual fee isn't automatically a lower-cost model when exclusions, supplemental services, or internal coordination create additional expense. Use the chart below to document all costs.

Model the Full Cost

- Base fee & annual increases
- Ticket, hour, & severity limits
- Proactive services & consulting
- Spend, user, or consumption-linked charges
- Critical, after-hours & Microsoft escalation charges
- Transition, internal labor, & exit costs
- Potential reinstatement exposure

RESEARCH LENS

"FinOps is no longer just explaining past spend. It's shaping future technology decisions before commitments are made."

Source: FinOps Foundation, *State of FinOps 2026*

Commercial Path Comparison

Scenario	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Risk Adjustment	3-Year Total
Renew as Proposed					
Renegotiate Unified					
Alternative Provider					
Hybrid/Transitional					

30-60%

average savings from third-party support.

Source: Gartner, *Market Guide for Microsoft Support Services*

RFP, References, POC, & Transition

Translate the evaluation framework into a sourcing process that produces verifiable evidence. Require every provider to respond to the same requirements, clearly distinguish included, optional and excluded services, and support material claims with contractual commitments or documented proof.

RFP Modules

Every provider should respond to the same modules and evidence requirements.

- Coverage & service scope
- SLAs & reporting
- Security & privacy
- Transition & governance
- Engineering & ownership
- Microsoft escalation
- Pricing & contract terms
- References & POC

Validation Requirements

- Obtain at least 3 references comparable in size, workload mix, and risk profile.
- Measure expertise, response, restoration, communication, ownership, escalation, security, and reporting.
- Conduct a 60-90-day POC across three to five representative workloads where contract terms permit.
- Assess financial stability, staffing continuity, insurance, data portability, and exit readiness.

Evidence

- Don't award full credit for broad claims. Require:
- A contractual commitment or defined deliverable
 - Named delivery owners
 - Sample SLA, reporting, or security evidence
 - A documented Microsoft escalation process
 - Clear exclusions, dependencies, & additional fees



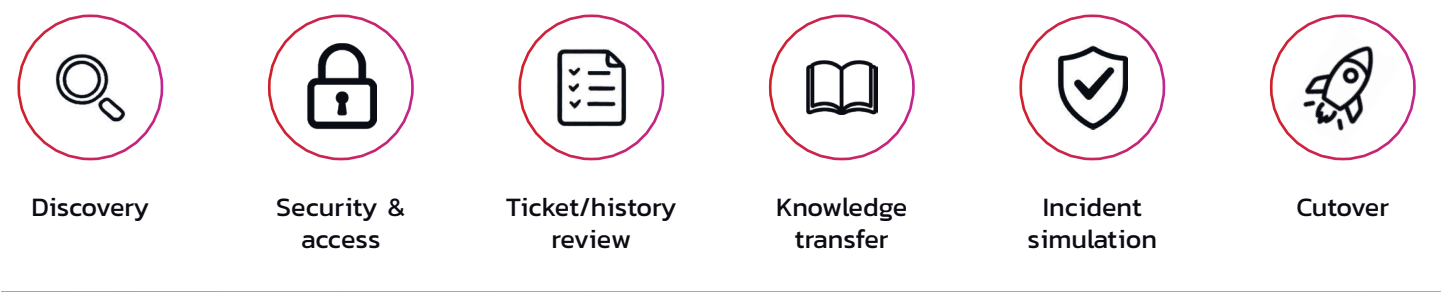
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MARKET SIGNAL

Consider trial periods and check customer references.”

Source: Forrester, *The Current State of Independent Third-Party Software Support*

Transition Milestones



Scoring Matrix

Use a weighted scoring model to make trade offs visible and prevent price from overwhelming operational requirements. Score only against documented evidence, contractual commitments, reference findings, and proof-of-concept results.

Weighted Scoring Matrix

Weighted score = score ÷ 5 × category weight

Category	Weight	Score (1-5)	Weighted Score
Coverage & Future-State Fit	12%		
Engineering & Ownership	16%		
SLAs & Operating Performance	14%		
Security & Supply Chain Risk	12%		
Commercial Value	12%		
Entitlement/Contract Fit	10%		
POC & References	10%		
Transition & Viability	8%		
Reporting/Evidence Quality	6%		
Total	100%		

Scoring

- 1: Doesn't meet requirement
- 2: Partially meets; material gaps
- 3: Meets baseline requirement
- 4: Exceeds requirement with evidence
- 5: Materially exceeds requirement & reduces risk



A high total score should never override a failed mandatory requirement.

Red Flags & Final Decision

Weighted scoring compares acceptable options. Pass/fail gates determine whether an option is acceptable at all. A failed gate should trigger disqualification, remediation, or explicit executive risk acceptance, not an informal score adjustment.

Pass/Fail Gates



- Required workload coverage
- Acceptable data controls
- Auditable SLA reporting
- Successful POC
- 24/7 critical engineering
- Legal cancellation rights
- Defined Microsoft escalation
- Acceptable exit & reinstatement terms

Red Flags



- Vague engineer access or escalation
- Undocumented security or fourth parties
- Unconfirmed entitlements or cancellation rights
- Acknowledgment-only SLAs
- Unmodelable pricing
- No comparable references or POC
- Undefined transition

Decision Record

Support models considered and evidence reviewed

- Material trade offs and residual risk owners
- Total-cost assumptions, references, and POC findings
- Contractual protections, transition plan, and contingencies



Final test: Can leadership explain why the selected model offers the best enterprise outcome using the documented requirements, evidence, economics, risk, and business impact?



Preserve the completed scorecard, risk acceptance, source documents, and approval record as part of the sourcing decision file.

Make the renewal a decision, not a default.

Benchmark Your Microsoft Support

See how your current agreement compares across cost, coverage, engineering access, Microsoft escalation, security, contract flexibility, and transition readiness.

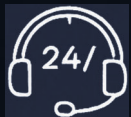
[Request a Support Benchmark](#)

Talk to a Microsoft Support Expert

Discuss your Microsoft environment, renewal timing, and support requirements with an experienced specialist.

[Talk to an Expert](#)

Why US Cloud



24/7

Microsoft Support



SENIOR

Microsoft-Certified Engineers



30-50%

Typical Client Savings

About US Cloud

US Cloud is the world's only independent third-party provider of Microsoft enterprise support capable of replacing Microsoft Unified Support. Supporting Global 2000 and Fortune 500 organizations worldwide, US Cloud delivers senior Microsoft-certified engineers, faster response times, and 30-50% cost savings compared to Microsoft Unified Support — without affecting access to Microsoft products or services.



uscloud.com

(800) 200-8440

uscloud.

Research Behind This Guide

- Gartner, *Market Guide for Independent Third-Party Software Support of Megavendors*
- Gartner, *Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services*
- Gartner, *2026 Technology Trends for Customer Service and Support*
- Forrester, *The Current State of Independent Third-Party Software Support*
- Verizon, *2026 Data Breach Investigations Report*
- Verizon, *2026 Breach Impact Study*
- Flexera, *2026 State of IT Asset Management Report*
- FinOps Foundation, *State of FinOps 2026*

This guide synthesizes third-party research, general procurement guidance, and US Cloud experience. Research findings have been attributed to their original publishers. US Cloud-specific capabilities, savings, and service claims are based on US Cloud company and client-result data. Readers should validate contract terms, entitlements, licensing rights, and provider capabilities for their own environments.