

SAA-C03 Pricing & Governance

The cost, guardrail, and audit tools that candidates mix up most often in scenario questions.

BEST FOR	FOCUS	USE WITH
Sorting out cost tools and governance controls	Calculator vs actual spend, guardrails vs audit	Quick Summary + Cheat Sheet

Tool	What it is for	Typical exam clue
Pricing Calculator	Estimate expected architecture cost before deployment.	You are planning a new design and need a forecast.
Cost Explorer	Analyze actual spend trends, usage patterns, and forecasts.	You already run workloads and want to see where money goes.
Budgets	Alert when actual or forecasted spend crosses thresholds.	Need email/SNS notice before overspending.
Savings Plans	Lower cost for steady compute usage with usage commitment.	Workload is consistent and flexible over time.
Organizations SCPs	Set account-level guardrails for what actions are blocked or allowed.	Need preventive control across many accounts.
AWS Config	Detect configuration drift and evaluate compliance rules.	Need to know whether resources stay compliant over time.
Tags	Add business metadata for allocation, ownership, and automation.	Need showback/chargeback or cleanup ownership.
CloudTrail	Record API activity for audit and investigation.	Need to know who changed what and when.

2. Fast decision rules

Rule 1 — If the requirement is estimate-before-build, choose Pricing Calculator; if it is understand current spend, choose Cost Explorer.

Rule 2 — If you need preventive guardrails across accounts, use AWS Organizations SCPs; if you need detective compliance checks, use AWS Config.

Rule 3 — If access must stay private to AWS services, consider VPC endpoints before routing traffic through the internet.

Rule 4 — If compute demand is steady, evaluate Savings Plans; if demand is bursty, keep elasticity first and commit later.

3. Governance and cost traps

Rule 5 — If cost allocation by team/project matters, design a mandatory tagging strategy from day one.

Rule 6 — If the ask is audit trail for API calls, think CloudTrail, not CloudWatch metrics.

Rule 7 — If the architecture stores backups long term, lifecycle to colder S3 classes instead of keeping everything in Standard.

Rule 8 — If one answer reduces both ops effort and overprovisioning risk, it is often the best cost-optimized option.