

Mind the Data Gap

From Data Provider to Data Practitioner— Candid's Internal Journey

Tech Forward 2026 | Catherine Williams

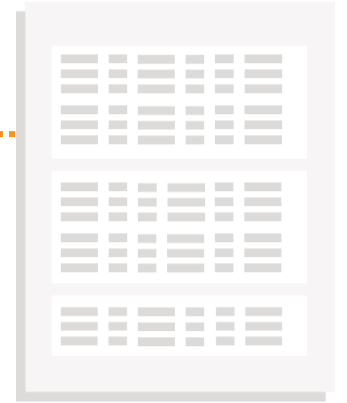
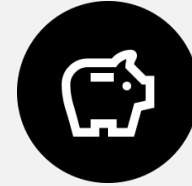
Candid.

Candid is a nonprofit that provides the most comprehensive data and insights about the social sector. Through research, collaboration, and training, Candid gets you the information you need to do good.

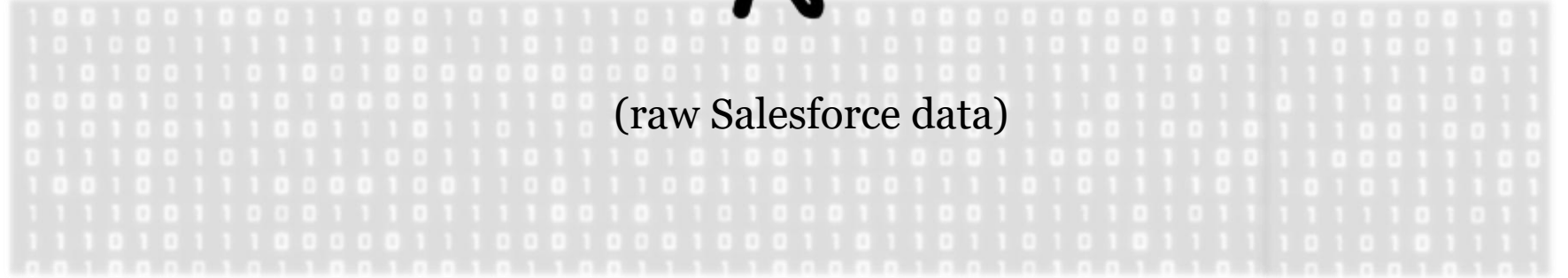


The question that started it all

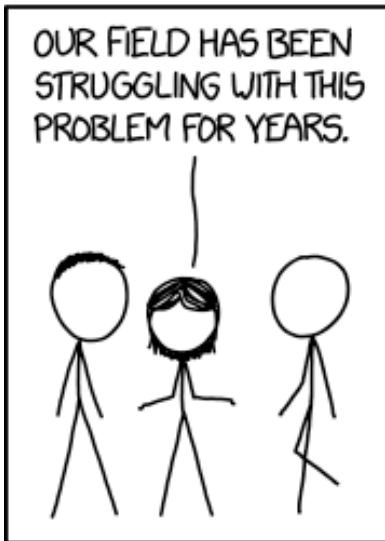
How many subscribers did we have last year?



So I went looking



(raw Salesforce data)



credit: xkcd 1831

The answer wasn't
anywhere.



What ensued

Intensive 6-month project to overhaul our business data practices

Built out a new clean “normalization layer”

Dissolved our Business Intelligence team

Introduced two new teams: Analytics, and Business Data Enablement

Refactored our portfolio of dashboards

Principle #1: Definitions before dashboards

Make sure everyone is using the
same language

(*Much* harder than it sounds)



Principle #2: Every metric should have a job

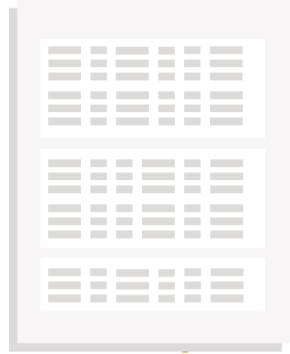
If nobody acts on it, it's a
vanity metric



Principle #3: Pull the thread



“I don’t trust the data”
is a fixable problem



Try this at home

Diagnostic questions:

- If I asked three different people in your organization how many active donors, subscribers, or program participants you have, would I get the same number?
- What's ONE definition that could be standardized?



- Look at the last dashboard you built or requested. Can you name the decision it's supposed to inform?
- If a metric on one of your dashboards went sideways next month, is there someone whose job would change?



- When was the last time someone in your organization said "I don't trust the data," and what happened next?
- Is there a question about your own organization that you've been avoiding because you're not sure the data can answer it?



Thank you!

Questions?