

• Practical guide · for CTOs and VPs of Engineering

The first 90 days of your first data hire

Your first data person will shape how the company counts revenue, customers and growth for years. This guide covers what to prepare, what each month should deliver, the minimum foundation to insist on, and the traps that quietly undo good hires.

TL;DR

- 01 Have access and a first question ready on day one.** Waiting on credentials is the most avoidable waste of a new hire's first weeks.
- 02 Days 1–30 are for listening and mapping,** not building. One small, visible win is enough.
- 03 Days 31–60 build the spine:** a warehouse, version-controlled dbt models and written metric definitions.
- 04 Days 61–90 make it trustworthy:** tests, access control, documentation and one dashboard leadership actually uses.
- 05 Protect them from the ticket queue.** A first data hire buried in ad hoc requests never builds the foundation.
- 06 Get help for the parts that need a second pair of senior hands,** such as architecture review or a backlog sprint, without adding headcount.

BEFORE DAY ONE

Access and accounts

- ☐ **Read access to production data sources,** through a replica or a read-only role, never the primary with write rights.
- ☐ **Admin on the analytics tools you already pay for:** warehouse, BI, ingestion tool.
- ☐ **A Git repository for analytics code,** with the same review rules as the rest of engineering.
- ☐ **A secret store or password manager entry,** so credentials are never sent over chat or email.
- ☐ **A list of every SaaS tool that holds business data:** billing, CRM, product analytics, support.

BEFORE DAY ONE

Context and people

- ☐ **One named business owner per key metric,** usually finance for revenue and product for activation.
- ☐ **The last board deck and its source spreadsheets,** so they can see what leadership already relies on.
- ☐ **A short list of open questions leadership wants answered,** ranked by you, not by whoever asks loudest.
- ☐ **Introductions booked** with finance, sales, product and support leads in week one.
- ☐ **Agreement on where requests go,** such as one channel or one board, and who prioritises them.

THE ONE THING TO DECIDE IN ADVANCE

Write down what “success at 90 days” means in two or three sentences, and share it with the hire on day one. Without it, every stakeholder will define it differently.

● The 90-day plan

Listen, then build the spine, then make it trustworthy.

DAYS 1–30

Listen and map

Understand the business, the data that exists and where the numbers already disagree.

- ☐ **Interview each department lead:** which decisions they make, which numbers they use, which they distrust.
- ☐ **Inventory every data source,** its owner, how it gets to analytics today and how fresh it is.
- ☐ **Trace the board's headline metrics back to source.** Note every manual step and spreadsheet in the chain.
- ☐ **List the conflicting definitions they find,** for example two versions of active customers.
- ☐ **Ship one small, visible win,** such as fixing a broken report people already use.
- ☐ **Write a one-page current-state map** and walk you through it.

BY THE END YOU SHOULD HAVE

A written map of sources, metrics and gaps, a prioritised list of problems, and one improvement people noticed.

DAYS 31–60

Build the spine

Create the first version of a single, reviewable path from raw data to agreed metrics.

- ☐ **Choose or confirm the warehouse** and load the most important sources with a managed ingestion tool.
- ☐ **Set up a dbt project in Git** with staging and mart layers and pull-request review.
- ☐ **Run a definitions workshop** for the top metrics with their business owners, and record the outcome in writing.
- ☐ **Model the core entities first:** customers, subscriptions or orders, and revenue.
- ☐ **Schedule runs** and send failure alerts to a channel someone watches.

BY THE END YOU SHOULD HAVE

Core models in production, written definitions for the top metrics signed off by their owners, and scheduled runs.

DAYS 61–90

Make it trustworthy

Add the controls that keep numbers right, and move leadership onto them.

- ☐ **Add tests to every model behind a leadership metric:** unique keys, not-null, accepted values, freshness.
- ☐ **Replace broad access with roles,** and mask personal data for people who do not need it.
- ☐ **Document models and owners** where people already look, such as dbt docs or the BI tool.
- ☐ **Rebuild one leadership dashboard** on the new models and retire the spreadsheet it replaces.
- ☐ **Agree a request process** and a regular review of priorities with you.

BY THE END YOU SHOULD HAVE

A tested, documented core, role-based access, one trusted dashboard and a 6-month roadmap the hire wrote.

Timelines stretch with company complexity. Keep the order the same even when the pace changes.

● The foundation

Five things to insist on before anyone builds more dashboards.

These are the minimum, not the ideal. Each one is cheap to set up early and expensive to retrofit after dozens of dashboards depend on the old way.

Warehouse

One place where analytics data lives, separate from production.

- ☐ **One warehouse, not several.** Pick what fits your cloud and team; the choice matters less than having one.
- ☐ **Separate environments** or schemas for development and production.
- ☐ **Spend controls from day one:** auto-suspend, sensible sizes and a budget alert.

dbt (or equivalent)

Transformations as reviewed code instead of copy-pasted SQL.

- ☐ **All business logic in version-controlled models**, not in BI tools or spreadsheets.
- ☐ **A layering convention:** staging per source, then marts per business concept.
- ☐ **Pull-request review and CI** that builds and tests changed models before merge.

Metric definitions

Written agreement on what each number means.

- ☐ **A named owner for each leadership metric**, who signs off its definition.
- ☐ **Definitions in plain language and in code**, kept in the same repository.
- ☐ **One implementation per metric**, ideally in a semantic layer that every tool reads.

Tests

Problems caught by machines before people notice them.

- ☐ **Key tests on every model behind a leadership number:** unique, not-null, relationships.
- ☐ **Freshness checks on each source**, with alerts that reach a person.
- ☐ **A short runbook:** what to do when a test fails and who to tell.

Access control

The right people see the right data, and you can show it.

- ☐ **Roles by team or function**, not individual grants or shared logins.
- ☐ **Personal data masked by default**, with access granted on need.
- ☐ **Service accounts per tool, credentials in a secret store**, and an offboarding step that revokes access.

GOOD ENOUGH FOR NOW

One warehouse, one dbt project, written definitions for the handful of metrics leadership uses, tests on those models, and role-based access. Everything else can follow.

USUALLY SAFE TO POSTPONE

- Real-time or streaming pipelines
- A dedicated data catalogue product
- A second BI tool
- Custom orchestration beyond scheduled dbt runs

Common traps

Six ways good first hires stall, and what to do instead.

Hiring a builder, then using them as a report desk

A queue of ad hoc requests crowds out the foundation work.

Instead: Protect a share of their week for foundation work and agree a single request channel.

Buying tools before agreeing on questions

New tools add cost and surface area without fixing trust.

Instead: Start from the decisions leadership needs, then pick the smallest stack that serves them.

Granting broad access to move fast

It is easy to grant and hard to take back later.

Instead: Use roles and masking from the start; it costs little at small scale.

Letting each team keep its own definition

Every department's number is right by its own logic, so meetings argue about numbers instead of decisions.

Instead: Resolve definitions with named owners in the first two months.

Skipping tests because the data looks fine

Silent breakages reach leadership before anyone on the data side sees them.

Instead: Test the leadership path first, then widen coverage.

Leaving them alone

A first data hire has no peer to review their work or challenge their design.

Instead: Give them a reviewer: a senior engineer, an advisor or an outside team.

Where an outside team helps

Senior support around your hire, not instead of them

BEFORE THEY START

Audit and roadmap

An independent review of your warehouse, models and BI, so the hire starts with a map and a prioritised plan.

DAYS 31-60

Foundation sprint

Staging, core marts, tests and metric definitions built alongside your hire, in your repo and your cloud.

ONGOING

A reviewer and extra hands

Pull-request review and a steady flow of tested work, so your hire is never the only senior data voice.

Hiring your first data person?

Baked Labs builds and runs tested, documented data foundations for startups. If a second opinion on your plan would help, we are happy to talk it through.

bakedlabs.co →