The People Say No: Resisting Data Centers

TOOLKIT

MediaJustice

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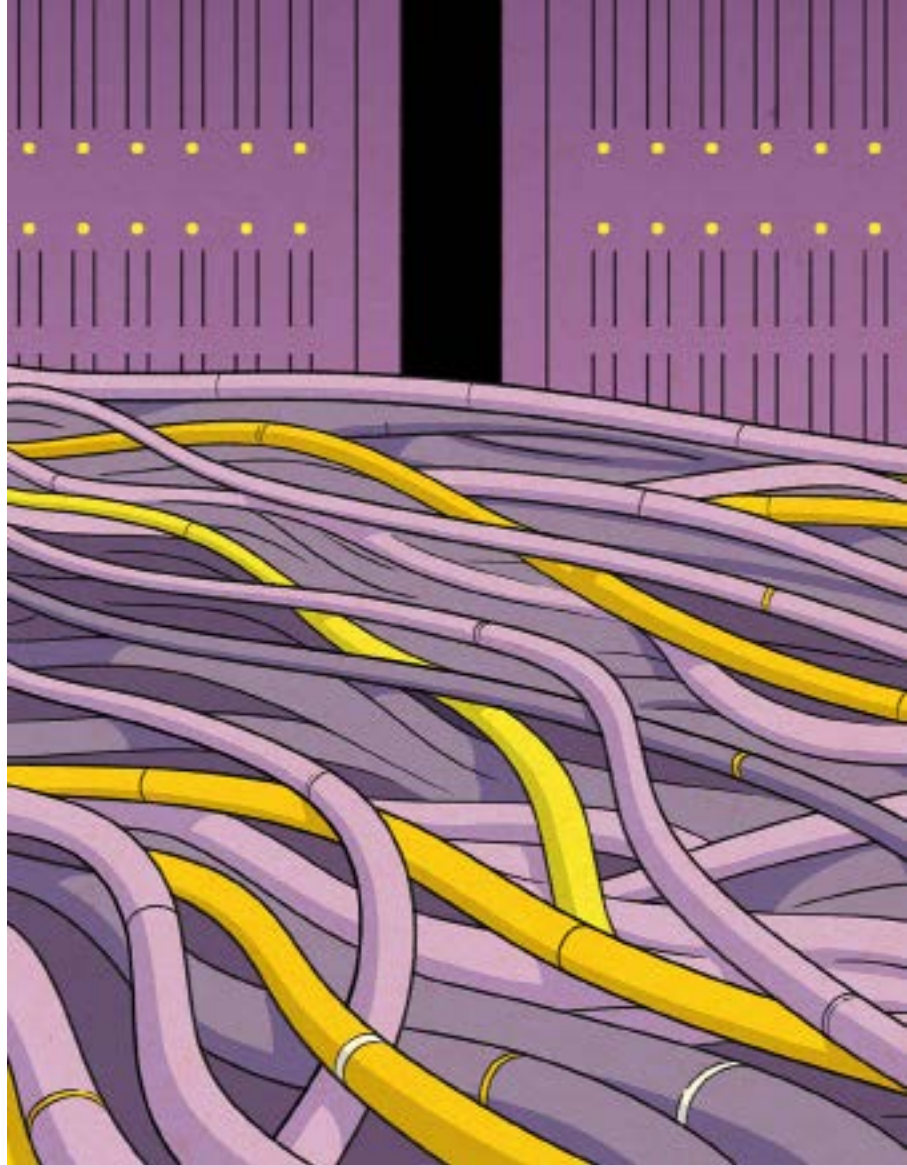# Toolkit

Updated January 2026

Letter from MediaJustice

The People Say No: Resisting Data Centers Toolkit is an offering to build knowledge, power, and resistance to one of the most dangerous extraction projects of our time – AI and data center expansion. The rise of artificial intelligence is behind massive data center buildouts as the world's largest tech corporations— also known as Big Tech—are spending billions of dollars on these power-hungry facilities. Tech corporations are marketing data center projects as "progress." The reality is that tech giants like Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and Meta are devouring our finite resources—energy, water, and land—and wreaking havoc on our communities. Pollution from data centers is suffocating frontline communities, contaminating and depleting drinking water, and destroying ecosystems necessary for our survival. Meanwhile, monthly utility bills spike as tech corporations offload the costs of their infrastructure upgrades onto everyday people.

This toolkit is aimed at helping communities cut through the propaganda, disinformation, and secrecy that are powering rapid data center development. Whether your community is currently battling a data center project – or looking to create protective measures for your land, energy, and water – we hope this toolkit can help strengthen your fight and move us towards a world where people aren't being poisoned in the name of innovation, where communities aren't competing with corporations for water, and where Big Tech doesn't get to take over democratic processes aimed at protecting people and the environment we live in. Tech companies would like us to believe that data centers are inevitable. But we know, when we fight, we win! In the past two years, at least 142 activist groups across 24 states have organized to stall or stop data center projects throughout the U.S. MediaJustice is ready to fight and be in solidarity with local communities fighting Big Tech extraction.

In solidarity,
MediaJustice

MediaJustice

Introduction to the Harms of Data Centers and Their Rapid Expansion

Fact or Fiction

(45 - 60 mins)

Description:

An introduction to the harms of data centers and the current context of their rapid expansion.

Key Points:

- Big Tech corporations, investors, and the State are working in partnership to manufacture an AI boom, resulting in the rapid expansion of hyperscale data center development.

- Hyperscale data centers consume insatiable amounts of finite resources, including energy, fresh drinking water, infrastructure, and land. They exacerbate pollution and destroy necessary ecosystems, leaving local communities to shoulder the environmental and economic costs while tech billionaires and investors profit.

Materials:

- Slides (bit.ly/FactOrFictionSlides)
- Masking tape, paper, marker

Key Terms

- **Data Centers** – Data centers are the physical manifestation of our digital activity. They are giant warehouses full of computer servers, chips, and equipment that power AI and other technologies. Data centers consume insatiable amounts of finite resources, including electricity, water, infrastructure, and land. They exacerbate pollution and destroy necessary ecosystems, leaving local communities to shoulder the environmental and economic costs while tech corporations and their investors profit.

- **Generative AI** – Generative AI produces "new" content, including text, images, and videos, by analyzing and mimicking patterns in vast amounts of our existing data. Training AI requires consuming megawatt-hours or even gigawatt-hours of electricity, enough energy to power thousands of homes for a year.

- **Big Tech** – A blanket term for the world's largest and most influential technology companies. The "Big 5" often refers to five companies—Amazon, Apple, Alphabet (Google), Meta (Facebook), and Microsoft. The "Malicious 7" can be expanded to include Nvidia and Tesla. The concept of Big Tech can also extend to the major Chinese technology firms—Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi—collectively referred to as BATX.

- **The State** – Political organization of society, or the body politic, or, more narrowly, the institutions of government. *(Source)*

- **Nondisclosure agreement (NDA)** – a legally binding contract where two or more parties agree not to disclose certain confidential or proprietary information. Tech corporations often use these to prevent opportunities for communities to research or to solicit independent expert assessments.

Directions

Share Definition.

Set up the **slides** to follow along through this activity.

Explain that this activity is designed to discuss data centers and their connection to AI, and why the expansion of these projects is escalating harm and destruction to people and the planet while lining the pockets of tech billionaires.

With a show of hands, how many people have heard of data centers?
- Where have you heard about them, and what have you heard?
- Does anyone know if you have one in or near your community?

Does anyone want to try to explain what they are?

After participants call out what they know, share the **slide** and invite a volunteer to read the definition aloud.

Data centers are the physical manifestation of our digital activity. They are giant warehouses full of computer servers, chips, and equipment that power AI and other technologies. Data centers consume insatiable amounts of finite resources, including electricity, water, infrastructure, and land. They exacerbate pollution and destroy necessary ecosystems, leaving local communities to shoulder the environmental and economic costs while tech corporations and their investors profit..

Move to the next **slide** and read to the group:

While small and mid-size data centers have existed for decades, Big Tech corporations, investors, and the State are working in partnership to manufacture an AI boom that requires supersizing data centers and rapidly expanding the number of them worldwide. (Here is a rendering of Hyperion, a $10 billion, four million-square-foot campus data center Meta is building in Richland Parish, Louisiana. You can see it has the footprint the size of Manhattan.)

Explain that we will play a **"Fact or Fiction"** game to learn more about data centers.

Fact or Fiction Game.

Place a long tape line on the floor to create two distinct areas for participants. Make a sign labeled "Fact" and another labeled "Fiction" and hang them up on either side of the tape so that participants can stand (or sit) on one side or the other, depending on how they respond to the prompt.

Explain that you will read a statement. Participants should decide if they think the statement is "Fact" or "Fiction" and stand on that respective side of the tape line.

Follow along with the **slides** to reveal each answer.

Facilitator Note: Read the full answers below. The slides have been simplified, so they do not have all the information below.

1. **Large hyperscale data centers are owned and operated by massively wealthy Big Tech corporations, like Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Meta (Facebook), and Microsoft.**

   FACT – Big Tech corporations are using their economic and monopoly power to drive their latest extraction and profit-making project – AI, and its physical infrastructure, which are data centers.

   Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, and Meta plan to spend nearly $400 billion on data centers in 2025 alone.

2. **The Trump administration is working alongside Big Tech to accelerate AI and data center expansion.**

   FACT – The billions of dollars Big Tech donated to Trump's second presidential campaign are paying off. The Trump administration is fully invested in accelerating AI and data expansion. A few examples include:

   - Creating the "AI and Crypto Czar" position for venture capitalist David Sacks, who advocates against regulating emerging technologies. (This will further supersize Big Tech's wealth and monopoly power.)
   - Giving tech corporations like Palantir and Anduril billions of dollars worth of government contracts for AI-powered surveillance technology, while simultaneously gutting healthcare and food security for millions of Americans through his Big Beautiful Bill.
   - Issuing executive orders aimed at boosting nuclear power while eroding the autonomy of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), an independent agency tasked with regulating nuclear reactors and protecting Americans from exposure to radiation.

3. **The U.S. has the second-largest number of data centers in the world.**

   FICTION – The US has by far the most, with over 5,400 data centers, while the rest of the world combined has 1,469.

   This number will grow as over $2 trillion is projected to go towards generative AI investment globally over the next five years, with half of that spending in the U.S.

4. **AI is transforming how data centers are built.**

   FACT – 20 yrs ago, the average data center would be a 20 megawatt (20 million) data center. Today, AI, and specifically generative AI, has created the need for hyperscale data centers that require gigawatt or multi-gigawatt campuses (1 billion or more).

   Generative AI produces "new" content, including text, images, and videos, by analyzing and mimicking patterns in vast amounts of our existing data. *(ChatGPT, for example)*

   [Advance to next slide]

   AI has transformed how data centers are built so rapidly that Meta ripped down a data center still under development in 2023 and redesigned it for higher-powered chips. (You can see from this satellite imagery how Meta knocked down the building structure at a site in Texas before redesigning and constructing it with a much larger footprint.) *(Source)*

5. **Data centers are built far from residential areas.**

    FICTION – Data centers are currently concentrated in or near major metro areas with large power grids due to their need for massive amounts of energy. The largest concentrated areas include Atlanta, Northern Virginia, Phoenix, Silicon Valley, Dallas, and Chicago. [Show map of concentrated areas & image of data centers right next to a residential neighborhood]

    With Big Tech corporations competing for AI dominance, we are seeing more land grabs into farmlands, where generations of farmers are facing pressure to give up their land as it is rezoned for data centers from Michigan to Indiana.

6. **The massive energy demands from data centers hike up energy costs for everyday consumers.**

    FACT – In Georgia, a typical residential customer is paying $43 more per month, or $516 more per year, on their electric bill than they were two years ago.

    Without laws to protect consumers from paying for the expensive upgrades to power grids to accommodate Big Tech's energy demands, reports project increases in electricity bills by 8% nationally and as much as 25% in some regions by 2030.

7. **Tech corporations are investing in renewable energy sources to power their data centers.**

    FICTION – Big Tech's intent to push AI into every aspect of our lives binds us to a future of more – not less – dirty energy. AI data centers must be powered 24/7, 365 days a year, so data centers can't rely on intermittent renewable energy sources like wind and solar power. They also need diesel generators for backup power, which release pollutants and toxins that cause asthma, cancer, heart attacks, and cognitive decline.

    Big Tech and the State are working in partnership to postpone coal plant closings, drill new gas wells, and invest in nuclear energy, including reopening Three Mile Island, site of the US's worst nuclear disaster.

8. **The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a federal agency, is committed to monitoring pollution emitted from data centers.**

    FICTION – In lockstep with Big Tech's agenda, the Trump administration has gutted and transformed the EPA to clear the path for data center expansion. This includes:
    - Mass firings and elimination of research at the EPA
    - Pushing to rescind the 2009 declaration, known as the endangerment finding, which concluded that planet-warming greenhouse gases pose a threat to public health.

    [Advance to next slide]

    - Trump's appointed head of the EPA has declared AI a core part of the EPA's Mission. He states, "The digital revolution has ushered in new needs and new industries which demand new permitting rules that help, not hamper development." – Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator

9. **Data centers require massive amounts of fresh water to operate.**

   FACT – <u>Only fresh drinking water can be used by data centers</u> due to concerns of corrosion and bacteria growth. In addition, the water can't be recycled - in fact 80% of it evaporates, while the remaining is discharged to municipal wastewater facilities, which are having trouble handling the high volume of wastewater being produced.

   An <u>investigation</u> found "that some of the largest data center facilities were permitted to use more water a day than you might expect nearly 49,000 Americans to use."

   In Maricopa County, Arizona, a fast-growing data center hub with facilities owned by Meta, Microsoft, and Google, drought conditions are so extreme that <u>the state has revoked construction permits for new homes due to a lack of groundwater</u>.

10. **Despite all these harms, data centers bring lucrative economic opportunities to communities through job creation and tax revenue.**

   FICTION – Data centers create very few permanent jobs. Most jobs created are construction jobs, which can last <u>less than a year</u>, <u>often less than three</u>.

   Almost <u>half of state data center subsidies</u> – 16 out of 36 – do not actually require job creation. Those that do usually require a small number of jobs to be created. New Jersey requires 100 jobs, but the remaining states require 50 or less per project.

   Only <u>one permanent job is created for every $1.95 million spent on data center tax subsidies</u>.

Discussion.

While data centers are marketed as lucrative economic opportunities for communities, Big Tech corporations intentionally make it as opaque as possible to learn about the real impacts of data centers. Under the veil of protecting "trade secrets," corporations often sign nondisclosure agreements (NDAs), which can prevent the public from accessing critical information needed for meaningful debate. The information and research used to create this game involved many stakeholders' diligence and expertise to pierce through a fortress of secrecy surrounding data centers and their real impacts.

- Did anything surprise you from this activity?

- Are there other things you've heard that you are unsure if they are fact or fiction? Where are you hearing these messages?

- What other questions do you have about data centers?

Case Studies

(30 - 60 mins)

Description:

Here are two case studies on the real-life impacts of data centers. In Newton, Georgia, Meta's data center contaminates and drains the local water supply while raising utility costs for residents across the state. In Memphis, Tennessee, Elon Musk's xAi sets up a data center virtually overnight without community input or permits. The 35 gas turbines running 24/7 send asthma rates soaring, exacerbating the health burden of a community that has a cancer rate four times the national average.

Depending on the time allotted, there are three options for each case study:
1. To watch an excerpt from a short documentary
2. To watch the entire short documentary
3. To read a news article

We recommend watching both short documentaries and having a group discussion afterwards.

Materials:

- Internet access to watch video clips

Key Terms

- **Nondisclosure agreement (NDA)** – a legally binding contract where two or more parties agree not to disclose certain confidential or proprietary information. Tech corporations often use these to prevent opportunities for communities to research or to solicit independent expert assessments.

Directions

Introduce the two case studies.

Explain that we will be looking at two case studies of hyperscale data centers and the devastating impacts that they have had on local communities. In Newton, Georgia, Meta's data center contaminates and drains the local water supply while raising utility costs for residents across the state. In Memphis, Tennessee, Elon Musk's xAi sets up a data center virtually overnight without community input or permits. The 35 gas turbines running 24/7 send asthma rates soaring, exacerbating the health burden of a community that has a cancer rate four times the national average.

Case Study #1: META data center in Newton, GA

> **Option #1** – **Watch Excerpt** to see the environmental impact of the contamination and depletion of the water system (4 mins)
>
> > Watch the first 4 minutes of *I Live 400 Yards From Mark Zuckerberg's Massive Data Center* from 0:00 - 4:00
>
> **Option #2 – Watch Full Video** to see both the environmental and economic impacts of Meta's data center on local and statewide residents (RT 13:30mins)
>
> > *I Live 400 Yards From Mark Zuckerberg's Massive Data Center , More Perfect Union*
>
> **Option #3 – Read Article** *Their Water Taps Ran Dry When Meta Built Next Door, NY Times, July 16, 2025*

Case Study #2: xAI – Memphis, TN

> **Option #1 – Watch Excerpt** of the dirty build out of Elon Musk's xAI data center and its exacerbation of longtime environmental harms (7 mins 30)
>
> > Watch a 7-minute excerpt of *We Went to the Town Elon Musk Is Poisoning* from 3:00 - 10:25
>
> **Option #2 – Watch Full Video** to see how Elon Musk, the world's richest person, not only built a hyperscale data center without public input or proper permitting in Memphis, Tennessee, but also used his influence in government to restructure the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) so that it would not monitor but rather help facilitate data center construction. (RT: 17 mins)
>
> > *We Went to the Town Elon Musk Is Poisoning, More Perfect Union*
>
> **Option #3 – Read Article** *In Memphis, Elon Musk Pilots a Corporate Takeover Strategy, Jacobin, July 1, 2025.*

Discussion.

After engaging with the two case studies, ask the group:

- What methods did Meta (Mark Zuckerberg) and xAI (Elon Musk) use to get away with what they wanted?

- How did the community find out about it?

- How is the community trying to fight back?

- Is there anything that resonates with what your community is going through?

River of Life

(40 - 60 mins)

Description:

A visualization activity to ground participants in their community's history of struggle and where they see the fight against data centers fitting into their collective journey.

Note: This activity can be revisited to reflect on any progress and shifts in your organizing strategy and goals.

Materials:

- Large newsprint, markers

Directions

Work in teams to create a symbolic river of life.

In groups of 3-4 people, have folks work together to draw a river symbolizing their community's journey. They can start the river in their community's history and lead it to where they have kicked out the data center. Or perhaps the fight against the data center is just a riverbank milestone, and there are other places the river will lead to.

Example of a River of Life drawing

Invite the group to lean into the symbolism of the river:

- Are there bends or boulders in your river that change its course – obstacles or challenges your community has had to adapt to?

- Are there smaller streams that flow into your river – issues or groups of people joining your struggle?

- Are there offshoots from your river, signifying other fights to be had?

- Are there rapids or waterfalls symbolizing difficult or turbulent times?

- Are there calm or quiet ponds that represent periods of ease or stability?

Share back and discuss.

Have each small group share their River of Life drawing.

- What are some commonalities you notice across the groups?

- How does your community respond when faced with bends and boulders in their journey? What would help your community best navigate these future obstacles and challenges?

- Are there any additional allies or fights you want to see flowing into your river to build your power and solidarity?

- What will you need to maintain the harmony and health of your river – your community?

Reframing the Story

Myths and Messaging

(45 - 60 mins)

Description:
Participants will examine common myths from data center proponents, and practice crafting community-centered talking points that cut through propaganda and greenwashing while addressing the actual harms of hyperscale data centers.

Key Points:
- Tech corporations and lobbyists invest millions of dollars to control the narrative around AI and data center expansion, citing innovation, national security, and economic prosperity as benefits.

- This messaging, upheld by news outlets that Big Tech either owns or highly influences through platform control, obscures the record profits investors are making off this manufactured and speculative bubble, which expands Big Tech's wealth and monopoly power.

- These larger narratives are a massive cover-up of the violence that AI is actually weaponized for – racialized violence, genocide, surveilling and purging workers, automation of health care denials, and keeping people criminalized and locked up.

- On the local level, narratives favoring data center expansion are built upon false promises of economic development, the downplaying of environmental impacts, and the hidden costs to communities as they are forced to subsidize Big Tech's latest extraction and profit-making project.

Materials:
- Messaging Worksheet
- Copies of Data Center Fact Sheet
- Pens

Key Terms
- **Greenwashing** – the act of making false or misleading statements about the environmental benefits of a product or practice. It can be a way for companies to continue or expand their polluting and related harmful behaviors, all while gaming the system or profiting off well-intentioned, sustainably minded consumers. *(Source)*

Directions

Introduce data center myths.

Tech corporations and lobbyists invest millions of dollars to control the narrative around AI and data center expansion. This messaging, upheld by news outlets that Big Tech either owns or heavily influences through platform control, hides the actual harms of data centers.

Invite the group to call out different myths they have heard.

- Take several responses.
- From inflated employment numbers to greenwashing that minimizes the environmental harms of data centers, there are many myths about data centers that we must dispel.

Divide into groups.

- Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people, and give every group a copy of the Messaging Worksheet.
- Explain that folks will work together to develop counter-talking points to common myths and greenwashing messages about data centers.
- Let the groups work together for 10-15 minutes and check in to see how folks are doing.

Boost messaging with the Data Center Factsheet.

- Proceed to give everyone a copy of the Data Center Factsheet and explain that they can use this to strengthen their Community-Centered talking points.
- Invite them to add other examples of myths and greenwashing to the blank rows on their Messaging Worksheets and fill out the Community-Centered talking points as a group.

Share back and discuss.

When finished, go through each talking point and have the groups share what they came up with.

- What pro-data center talking points were the most challenging to counter?
- Were there other common pro-data center messages that people added? How did you respond?
- What else do you need to feel equipped to challenge the myths and greenwashing from data center proponents?

Messaging Worksheet

MESSAGING IN FAVOR OF DATA CENTERS	COMMUNITY-CENTERED TALKING POINTS
The AI revolution is here, and its reach will only continue to grow. If we don't allow this data center to be built in our city, we'll lose our opportunity to be part of this windfall of change and prosperity.	
This project will generate billions of dollars in tax revenue for our city, school district, and fire department. We can use these funds to improve our roads and other infrastructure.	
This data center project will be a huge boost to our economy, bringing thousands of trade and high-tech jobs to our community.	
We've witnessed economic revitalization from neighboring counties that have welcomed data centers into their communities. We're excited about this opportunity, as proximity to cloud services will only enhance the other industries we support here in our city.	
Outdated energy infrastructure is actually the main cause for the rise in consumer utility bills. This project is an opportunity to upgrade our infrastructure, including installing solar panels across our city, and creating a new system for recycled water, making our city water-positive.	

Allowing data centers on indigenous lands not only provides us with opportunities to use AI to preserve our culture and language, but also supports our data sovereignty.	
The company spearheading this data center project just released its annual environmental report, showing it is on track to achieve its climate commitments by 2030. We're proud to partner with a company spearheading the sustainable future we want from tech innovation.	

Data Center Fact Sheet

DATA CENTERS & AI

- Big Tech corporations, investors, and the state are working in partnership to manufacture an AI boom, resulting in the rapid expansion of hyperscale data centers, the facilities needed to power AI.

- Four Big Tech corporations – Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, and Meta – spent over $400 billion on data centers in 2025, with the figure projected to jump to $602 billion in 2026.

- Data center expansion is being driven by AI, specifically generative AI, which produces "new" content including text, images, and videos, by analyzing and mimicking patterns in vast amounts of our existing data.

- The Trump administration is working in lockstep with Big Tech to accelerate AI and data center expansion in a multitude of ways, including:

  » Creating his AI Action Plan and accompanying executive orders that facilitate the rapid deployment of AI-related infrastructure, reduce AI regulations, and increase AI exports.

  » Creation of the "AI and Crypto Czar" position for venture capitalist David Sacks, who advocates against regulating emerging technologies. This will further supersize Big Tech's wealth and monopoly power.

  » Giving tech corporations like Palantir and Anduril billions of dollars worth of government contracts for AI-powered surveillance technology, while simultaneously gutting healthcare and food security for millions of Americans through his Big Beautiful Bill.

  » Issuing executive orders aimed at boosting nuclear power while eroding the autonomy of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), an independent agency tasked with regulating nuclear reactors and protecting Americans from exposure to radiation.

  » Gutting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through mass firings and elimination of research, as well as pushing to rescind the 2009 declaration, known as the endangerment finding, which concluded that planet-warming greenhouse gases pose a threat to public health.

- As of March 2025, the US has over 5,400 data centers, while the rest of the world combined has 1,469. This number will grow as over $7 trillion is projected to go towards global data center construction over the next five years, with the U.S. accounting for 40% of that.

- The propaganda of AI is a massive cover-up of the violence that AI is actually weaponized for – racialized violence, genocide, surveilling and purging workers, automation of health care denials, and keeping people criminalized and locked up.

- AI is also turbocharging climate disinformation.

SPEED & LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

- Across the country, hyperscale data center projects are being fast-tracked and approved in secrecy behind non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and closed-door meetings. In Virginia, one of the world's largest concentrations of data centers, journalists filed a Freedom of Information Act request that revealed 25 out of 31 localities in Virginia have NDAs.

- Karen Hao reported in The Atlantic that in Goodyear, Arizona, "A records request to the city returned documents with all of the numbers redacted; a representative for the city said the numbers were 'considered proprietary by Microsoft.'"

- There is evidence of local politicians making backdoor deals with tech companies before the public is brought into the process. After Elon Musk coerced government officials into NDAs to fast-track his Colossus data center in Memphis, Tennessee, he flagrantly broke the law by illegally installing dozens of gas turbines. Peak nitrogen dioxide concentration levels have increased by 79% from pre-xAI levels due to these unpermitted gas turbines.

- In Oregon, elected officials who negotiated tax deals for an Amazon-owned data center to be built in the community were found to also own a stake in the fiber-optics company contracted for the data center buildout.

LAND

- Due to their need for massive amounts of energy, data centers have been concentrated in or near major metro areas with large power grids, including Atlanta, Northern Virginia, Phoenix, Silicon Valley, Dallas, and Chicago.

- Facing rising costs and limits in the public grid, there are rising land grabs by Big Tech into farmlands where generations of farmers are facing pressure to give up their land as it is rezoned for data centers from Michigan to Indiana. States with faster approval processes, fewer environmental and labor regulations, and lucrative tax incentives, like Texas, are also seeing a boom in data center construction.

- Data center expansion also threatens indigenous territories and their way of life, including protected ecosystems fundamental to reducing carbon emissions and regenerating land harmed by decades of industrial pollution and contamination.

ENERGY CONSUMPTION & INCREASING RISKS OF BLACKOUTS

- Data centers are massive energy guzzlers. One data center campus with a peak demand of one gigawatt is equivalent to the annual consumption of 1.8 million people, more than the city of Phoenix, San Antonio, or Philadelphia.

- Data centers' massive energy consumption can disrupt electricity flow to homes, increasing the risk of electrical fires, blackouts, and brownouts. Power outages threaten the safety of residents who cannot access air conditioning during heatwaves, utilize medical devices, or risk carbon monoxide poisoning due to the improper use of generators.

- Tech corporations often do not disclose how much power their data centers consume. Nineteen permits across 10 states — including 12 held by Google — have their generator capacity information fully or partially redacted under public disclosure exemptions for trade secrets.

- In 2024, data centers in the US used around 200 terawatt-hours of electricity, roughly what it takes to power Thailand for a year, or enough to power more than 7.2 million US homes for a year. About 56% of this electricity comes from fossil fuels.

- The massive energy demand is forcing the postponement of coal plant closings, drilling of new gas wells, and investments in nuclear energy.

- All four hyperscalers – Amazon (AWS), Microsoft (Azure), Google (GCP), and Meta (Facebook) – struck landmark deals for nuclear power in 2024, including Microsoft's partnership with Constellation Energy to restart the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania, site of the worst commercial nuclear

disaster in US history in 1979. Like other nuclear disasters in Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011), all of these areas remain radioactive.

- There are many proposed natural gas projects under review at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), including a 300-mile-long natural gas pipeline that would cut through tribal lands and historic cities across Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

- Analysts predict that by 2030, AI will consume nearly as much energy as the entire country of Japan.

OFFLOADING COSTS ONTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Everyday people regularly pay data center energy costs for the wealthiest companies in the world. From Georgia to Ohio, the industry has fought against concrete obligations to ensure its costs aren't passed along to ratepayers. Meanwhile, energy costs have gone up for regular consumers, directly attributable to data centers and associated energy infrastructure.

- An analysis of electricity prices across the country found that monthly electricity costs have gone up as much as 267% over the last five years in locations near substantial data center activity.

- Without laws to protect consumers from paying for the expensive upgrades to power grids to accommodate Big Tech's energy demands, reports project increases in electricity bills by 8% nationally and as much as 25% in some regions by 2030.

- In Georgia, which in June 2025 surpassed Northern Virginia to become the fastest-growing data center market due to an Amazon hyperscale data center, a typical residential customer is paying $43 more per month, or $516 more per year, on their electric bill than they were two years ago.

- Data centers often negotiate contracts that secure subsidized rates or fixed-price electricity agreements that shield them from long-term cost volatility.

WATER USE

- Hyperscale data centers need massive cooling systems, each of which has extensive water-energy-environmental impacts:

  » In water-cooled systems, only fresh drinking water can be used by data centers due to concerns of corrosion and bacterial growth. In addition, the water can't be recycled – in fact 80% of it evaporates while the remaining is discharged to municipal wastewater facilities, which are having trouble handling the high volume of wastewater being produced.

  » Other cooling systems, such as air-cooled and closed-loop systems, require additional energy to operate. Air-cooled systems are known for their excessive noise. Closed-loop systems, which rely on a concentrated cocktail of chemicals to prevent corrosion, bring nitrite, glycol, and heavy metals at thousands of times the limits set for surface waters when it must periodically be drained to prevent buildup.

- Data center water use is a closely guarded secret. A journalist covering Microsoft's data center in Goodyear, Arizona, found that its water use records were considered proprietary. In Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado, utility agencies sued Business Insider to prevent the release of metered water use records.

- An investigation found "that some of the largest data center facilities were permitted to use more water a day than you might expect nearly 49,000 Americans to use."

- In recent years, Google faced criticism for its plans to build a massive data center in Mesa, Arizona,

after it was revealed that the company would pay a lower water rate than most residents. The deal, negotiated with the city, allowed Google to pay $6.08 per 1,000 gallons of water, while residents paid $10.80 per 1,000 gallons.

- Because electricity is more costly for data centers than water, companies often build their facilities in places with cheap power, even if the area is water-stressed or drought-stricken.

  » Roughly 40% of data centers in the U.S. are in "water-stressed" areas of the country.

  » In San Antonio, Texas, local residents are being asked to ration water amidst a statewide drought, yet the nearby data centers have no such restrictions.

  » In Maricopa County, Arizona, a fast-growing data center hub with facilities owned by Meta, Microsoft, and Google, drought conditions are so extreme that the state has revoked construction permits for new homes due to a lack of groundwater.

ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS & GREENWASHING

- Power generation is the largest source of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions in the world. In the unbridled frenzy for AI and data center expansion, many tech corporations are assembling microgrids or behind-the-meter energy configurations to bring their data centers online. Microgrids comprised of gas turbines are known to emit harmful nitrogen oxides (NOx), greenhouse gases (GHGs), and hazardous air pollutants.

- In addition to the massive amounts of energy data centers consume while operating, data centers also rely on diesel generators for backup power, which release pollutants and toxins that cause asthma, cancer, heart attacks, and cognitive decline.

- An investigation found that more than 230 data center locations were in communities highly overburdened by environmental pollutants. In regions already burdened by public health challenges stemming from environmental racism and gentrification, these troubling health impacts will disproportionately affect communities of color and exacerbate existing health disparities.

- By 2028, researchers estimate the power going to AI-specific purposes will rise to between 165 and 326 terawatt-hours per year. That could generate the same emissions as "driving over 300 billion miles—over 1,600 round-trips to the sun from Earth."

- Data centers also contaminate fresh water sources by leaking into local water wells and through energy-seeking projects such as large-scale buildouts of gas pipelines and fracking.

- Big Tech uses greenwashing and disinformation to diffuse public outrage and appear transparent.

  » Reported data center emissions are likely 662% higher than Big Tech claims, as gaps between real-world and market-adjusted carbon footprints allow corporations to misrepresent their actual carbon emissions. This happens through Renewable Energy Certificates (Recs), which are certificates that a company purchases to show it is buying renewable energy-generated electricity. Renewable Energy Certificates do not need to be used at a particular facility, rendering a skewed perception of the actual renewable energy powering an on-site facility. In other words, the clean energy that offsets the emissions could be generated in a different country, at a different time of day, or even in the past. This is key to corporations like Meta being able to claim that they have matched "100 percent of its electricity use with renewable energy since 2020."

- Data center myths are either given directly as talking points or echoed in a monopolized communication chamber that includes news outlets that Big Tech either owns or highly influences through platform control, as well as utility monopolies and other stakeholders that stand to profit from AI and data center expansion.

- The frenzied pace and often unregulated manner in which hyperscale data centers are being built have also wreaked havoc on local communities. In Richland Parish, Louisiana, where Meta is building a data center the size of the entire island of Manhattan, car crashes have increased by more than 600% on the roads surrounding the Hyperion hyperscale data center. School officials shut down the playground near the data center because construction workers kept running into the playground fence.

FALSE PROMISES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: TAX SUBSIDIES & JOB CREATION

- Across the US, states are disproportionately giving away hundreds of millions in tax breaks to some of the richest companies in history. Nearly 60% of hyperscale data center infrastructure serves Amazon, Google, and Microsoft alone, Big Tech corporations with a collective market cap approaching $9 trillion USD. And yet cities and states give these corporations major tax breaks to entice data center construction, losing significant potential tax revenue.

- The city of Sidney, Ohio, gave Amazon a 30-year, 100% tax abatement for the construction of a $3 billion data center project – in exchange for a $50 million payment to the city over 15 years..

- Tax breaks given to developers can amount to more than $2 million lost for every permanent, full-time job at a data center. These millions lost in tax revenue could be allocated to desperately needed public services, such as education, public healthcare, schools, transportation, and other vital services that residents depend on.

- Data centers create very few permanent jobs.

  » Most jobs created are construction jobs, which can last less than a year, often less than three.

  » One report found that even the largest data centers generally employ fewer than 150 permanent workers, and some have as few as 25.

- A tech corporation's public-facing promises often do not match contractual obligations.

  » Almost half of state data center subsidies – 16 out of 36 – do not actually require job creation. Those that do usually require a small number of jobs to be created: New Jersey requires 100 jobs, but the remaining states require 50 or fewer per project.

  » According to a CNBC analysis, states are forfeiting hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. Currently, at least 42 states either offer sales tax exemptions for data centers or have no sales tax at all.

- Greg LeRoy, executive director of Good Jobs First summed up the impact of this as, "When tax breaks don't pay for themselves, only two things can happen: Either public services are reduced in quality, or everybody's taxes go up in other ways if you're going to try to keep things the same in terms of quality of public services."

- Big Tech corporations often play cities against one another in a quest for government incentives.

- Data from Indiana shows that data centers create 100 times fewer jobs than other types of economic development, by energy used.
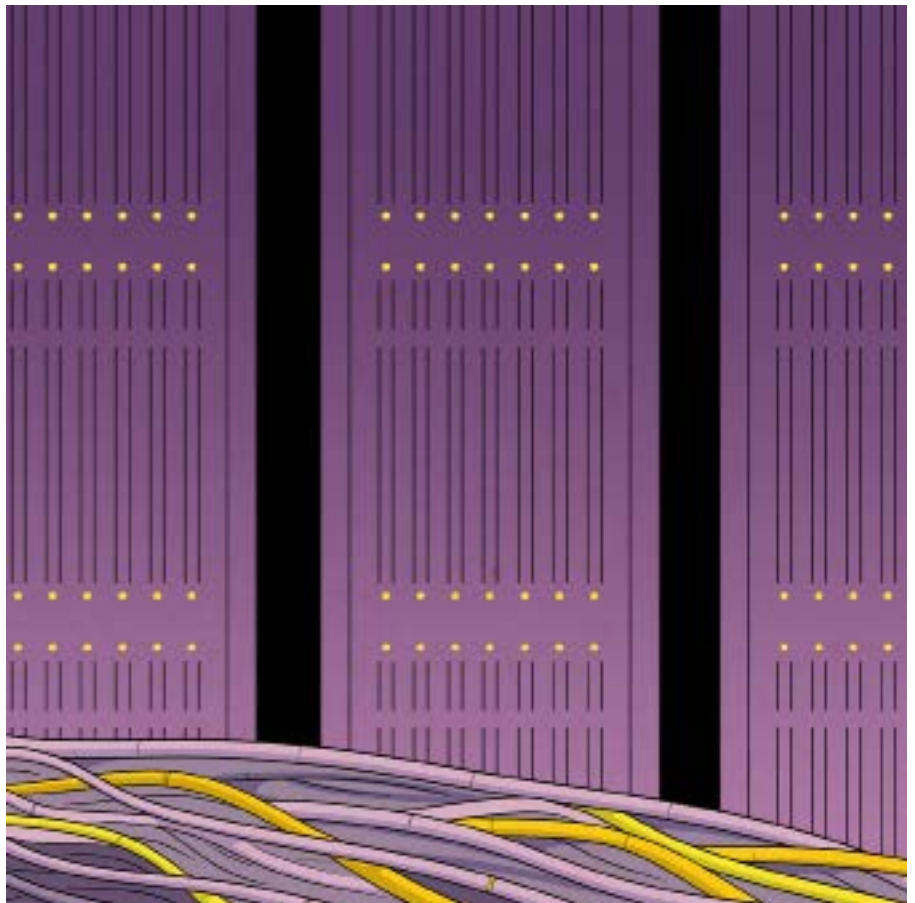
Scenario Role Plays

(60 - 120 mins)

Description:

Four scenarios offer participants the chance to role-play how they would respond to those who support data center development.

Note: Facilitators should feel free to tailor these scenarios to their specific needs and context.

Materials:

- Printouts of Roles (cut up)
- Copies of Data Center Factsheet

Directions

Setting Up the Scenarios and Roles.

Explain that everyone will participate in a role-play to practice responding to those who favor data center development.

- Ask participants to organize themselves into groups of 2-4 people.

- Either assign or let groups pick a scenario and the roles they want to play. Everyone should get a piece of paper with a scenario and a character description.

- Let participants know the role descriptions are guides, and they should feel free to customize their character as they see fit.

- Invite the pro-data center volunteers to huddle together to shape what they want to say, and the volunteers speaking out against the data centers to do the same.

- Hand out copies of the Data Center Factsheet so participants can use it to develop talking points.

Give groups at least 10-15 minutes to prepare their talking points before they come together to perform the scenarios.

Role Play.

Have groups take turns acting out their scenarios. After each role play, folks should feel free to clap and give each other affirmations.

Discussion.

- What was challenging about acting out your roles?

- How did this compare to any real-life situations you've encountered, or imagine encountering in your fight against data centers?

- What would support you in feeling confident about doing this in a real situation?

Scenario #1: City Council meeting announcing the approval of this data center despite energy grid issues (4 Volunteers)

The scenario takes place at a City Council meeting, where it is announced that a 1 GW data center project is moving forward in accordance with zoning guidelines. The data center project was approved unanimously by all City Council members before any public meetings were held about it. City officials view the data center as a lucrative opportunity to generate tax revenue and create jobs. The developer has purchased a dormant auto factory, and says they have a commitment from the local utility company to connect to the public grid. The developer is working to secure water and obtain the necessary environmental and traffic permits.

Your Role: Mayor – You were a key player in advising on the creation of the state's data center subsidies, which have caught the attention of the world's leading tech corporations. You highlight the economic prosperity this will bring to your city. The Developer has promised 1,000 jobs. Additionally, the purchased property is an old auto plant factory that has been vacant for over 10 years. It's already zoned for industrial use, making it an ideal location for the 1GW data center project. The local news did a great piece about the auto plant factory revamp and the much-needed revenue it would bring. You can frame this project as a way to upgrade the city's infrastructure, which is indeed true. However, be cautious in how you mention it, as people are still upset about the energy blackouts, and you suspect there will be concerns about water usage as well.

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(cut along dotted line)

Your Role: Developer (LLC/ shell company) – The Mayor and the City Council members were excited by the 1,000 jobs you said this project would create. You noticed that the state's data center subsidy doesn't actually require any specifics on how many jobs are created, so feel free to get creative with what you promise to the community residents! You saw a local news piece raising concerns about the energy requirements of data centers. You did speak with the region's energy company, which has been excited to work together, so there should be no problems. They've mapped out a plan to ensure their energy grid has enough capacity to accommodate the 1 gigawatt needed for your data center. If concerns about water come up, you can share the closed-loop water system that will reduce water usage and, in fact, make the data center water-positive. There is no confirmed end user, but several companies, including Palantir and Amazon, have been in discussions.

Scenario #1: City Council meeting announcing the approval of this data center despite energy grid issues (4 Volunteers)

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Your Role: Community Member #1 – You are outraged that this data center has already been approved without public input! You've heard that data centers require a lot of energy and water, which concerns you. There have been a couple of energy blackouts this summer, including one that lasted over 72 hours, so you had to throw out a bunch of food and some medications. It's also been an unusually hot summer with long stretches of 95+ degree days. Not being able to use the AC is a significant public health concern, not to mention infuriating, as bills are getting harder and harder to pay!

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Scenario #1: City Council meeting announcing the approval of this data center despite energy grid issues (4 Volunteers)

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Your Role: Community Member #2 – You knew nothing about this data center project until your neighbor told you about it. You started looking online and read that data centers can raise people's electric bills, drain local water supplies, and also have harmful environmental impacts. You're worried about what this means for your monthly bills, and also medication costs, as several people in your family have severe breathing issues that require routine medical attention and care.

Scenario #2: **City Council meeting following the leaked information that Meta is applying to build a data center in a water-stressed community (4 Volunteers)**

It's a City Council meeting. An NDA has been signed by the Mayor and City Council members with Meta and Evergreen Industries for their data center project. City Council members are set to vote next week, but it has just been leaked that Meta is the tech corporation behind the project, and residents are raising concerns. The city and state have been in a drought for the last two years, so there's been tension around access to water. The Mayor will open up the space, acknowledging what an opportunity it will be to work with Meta and all the economic benefits it will bring the city. The Developer will hype up Evergreen Industries's commitment to sustainable development projects and highlight that Meta has already hit net zero in its emissions by matching "<u>100 percent of its electricity use with renewable energy since 2020</u>." After the Mayor and the Developer's remarks, community members will have a space to speak at the end.

Your Role: Mayor – you were so thrilled when Meta reached out about wanting to develop a data center in your city. You were a key player in advising the creation of the state's data center subsidies that have caught the attention of the world's leading tech corporations. There was an NDA signed with Meta, but somehow it got leaked, and now residents are raising concerns before the City Council vote next week. Your focus will be on this economic opportunity for this project and the excitement of partnering with the tech innovator Meta. Your city and the state have been in a drought for two years. You can pitch that the revenue from this project will help improve the city's infrastructure.

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(cut along dotted line)

Scenario #2: **City Council meeting following the leaked information that Meta is applying to build a data center in a water-stressed community (4 Volunteers)**

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Your Role: Greenwashing Developer with Evergreen Industries – you were highly upset when Meta's name got leaked, but you've also been trained to handle this. This area is experiencing a drought, so you will share Evergreen Industries' mission to bring sustainable solutions to the world's leading technology companies. You can also highlight Meta's climate commitments. Meta has already hit net zero in its emissions by matching "<u>100 percent of its electricity use with renewable energy since 2020</u>," so their approach to this project will be done with careful consideration and experience.

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Your Role: Community Resident #1—When you heard Meta was bringing the data center, you had a bad feeling in your stomach. You saw some news about a data center in Georgia that contaminated the local water supply and raised energy bills for residents across the state. Your state has been experiencing a drought for the last two years. Even though there is intermittent heavy rain and even flooding in different areas of the state, everyone has been restricted to watering lawns once per week under Stage 3 drought rules.

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Your Role: Community Resident #2 – Your cousin lives in Arizona, which is struggling with an extreme drought. There are some data centers where she lives, and she told you her city just revoked construction permits for some new homes there due to a lack of groundwater. Your city has been experiencing drought for the past two years, so you can't believe they would even consider bringing a project here that would interfere with the local water supply. Your cousin also told you her electric bills have been high, which she wonders if is related to the data centers.

Scenario #3: **Door Knocking (4 Volunteers)**

Two organizers are door-knocking to encourage community members to attend a City Council meeting and to express their opposition to a data center project application that is being voted on. The project is being proposed for a blighted industrial area that has been vacant for some time. The organizers have been working with a coalition of concerned community members and environmental activists for the past few months to learn more about this project and build community support against the data center. They speak to a couple who are both in favor of the data center, believing that it will spur the economy through job creation and tax revenue.

Your Role: Couple #1 – You don't know much about data centers, but you read an article in the paper about a data center coming to your town and how it will bring economic growth, so you're excited for that. This town could definitely use more good jobs.

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Your Role: Couple #2 — You saw a local news piece in which the Mayor expressed excitement about the data center project, so you are also excited. You feel the Mayor has done an incredible job bringing a Target to this town and has been committed to economic growth, so you trust the Mayor's vision and plan. The Mayor mentioned that tax revenue from this project would go toward schools, parks, and transportation system upgrades – something this town really needs!

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Your Role: Two Organizers – You both joined a coalition of concerned community members and environmental activists when rumors spread that a data center was trying to come to your town. You've researched how data centers strain local energy and water supplies and how they raise energy bills by making residents pay for infrastructure upgrades. Try to get commitments from folks to attend the next City Council meeting to express their opposition to this project.

Scenario #4: Press Interview (2 Volunteers)

Organizers have set up a press conference outside City Hall to oppose a data center project being voted on next week. The news reporter has a background in business, so they genuinely understand the lucrative opportunity this project will bring to the city. The Mayor has stated it will bring the city between $800 million and $1 billion in tax revenue and create 1,500 new jobs. The news reporter has covered organizers often and sees them as people who don't have anything better to do than complain and who also don't understand the complexities of supporting a city's economic growth.

Your Role: Reporter – You fully support the data center project the Mayor has been pitching. You've already spoken to the Mayor, various City Council members, and also to a representative from the Energy Company, who all state the benefits of this project. Your boss told you to cover this press conference today, so you're here, but you already know this project is a sure thing. The facts are undeniable – $800 million and $1 billion in tax revenue, and 1,500 new jobs. That breaks down to about $26 in revenue for every $1 spent, a figure that no other commercial industry can come close to providing.

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Scenario #4: Press Interview (2 Volunteers)

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Your Role: Organizer – You've been working with an environmental justice organization for past couple of years and someone you work with caught wind of this project through an article in the business section of the city newspaper. Your organization has been door knocking to spread awareness about this project and the environmental and economic harms it will bring to the community. You've organized this press conference today alongside an environmental health expert to talk about the pollution impacts of unregulated industrial project, and some members who can speak to their costly utility bills and various health issues from previous industrial projects in your community.

Building Our Fight

Fight The Power, Build Our Power

(60 - 90 mins)

Description:

An exploration of how communities are fighting back and making wins against data center expansion.

Key Points:

- AI and data center expansion are at the core of Big Tech corporations' and billionaires' consolidation of power and resources, at the expense of everyday people.

- Data centers have such glaring environmental and economic impacts that residents of all political backgrounds are fighting back through various local, regional, and even transnational tactics to slow these projects down, demand greater community input and control, and push back on the surveillance technologies that data centers make possible.

- Data centers can be resisted, just like other industrial infrastructure projects such as oil pipelines, Amazon warehouses, or trash-burning incinerators.

Materials:

- Printout of Wins, tape

- Internet access to watch a short documentary

Prep:

- Hang up the Printout of Wins around the room for the gallery walk.

Directions

Organizing Gets the Goods.

- Share this stat from Data Center Watch: *"142 activist groups in 24 states across party lines made organizing efforts that resulted in $64 billion worth of US data center projects being stalled or stopped between early 2023 and March 2025."*

- Ask if folks have heard about different strategies communities have employed to resist the expansion of data centers into their communities.

Gallery Walk of Wins.

Invite participants to walk around the room and note the various community-fought wins against data center expansion. The six examples of wins include:

1. **Establishing Moratorium - GEORGIA**
   - DeKalb County approves 100-day data center moratorium (July 8, 2025)
   - A 100-day moratorium was implemented to allow county staff time to assess the impact of the facilities on public safety and the general welfare of residents and to develop regulations that would mitigate any potential adverse effects.

2. **Zoning Restrictions - PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, VA.**
   - Counties try to keep data center development in bounds (Dec 23, 2024)
   - Creating a zoning ordinance to ensure data centers are built within industrial-zoned areas

3. **Removing data center industry members from City Zoning Committee - PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, VA.**
   - In a victory for residents, data centers yanked from county's data center reform group (Dec 20, 2024)
   - 9 members of a City Zoning Committee were ejected for their ties to the data center industry, real estate developers, builders, and utilities. The committee's reorganization made the group "more citizen-focused."

4. **Establishing City Water Ordinance - TUCSON**
   - After ousting Project Blue, Tucson adopts new city regulations for large water users (August 21, 2025)
   - Mayor Regina Romero and the Tucson City Council approved a city ordinance requiring customers who want to use large quantities of water to apply with the city. The new ordinance will also require those requests to become public records so that community members can access them.

5. **Ban on secrecy for public subsidies – NEW YORK**
   - Senate Bill S6394A 2025-2026 Legislative Session: Relates to the regulation of energy consumption by data centers.
   - New York lawmakers introduced the New York State Sustainable Data Centers Act (S6394A) that would require data centers to publicly report their energy and water usage and prohibit them from entering into agreements that keep this information secret.

6. **Legislation to Prevent Nondisclosure Agreements – NEW YORK**
   - [Senate Bill S373 2025-2026 Legislative Session Prohibits confidentiality and non-disclosure provisions from inclusion in certain contracts entered into by the state or a municipality.](#)
   - Pending legislation seeks to prevent government entities from using secrecy clauses in economic development contracts, which could impact data centers that receive public subsidies.

Discussion.

- What tactics stood out to you?

- Do any of these resonate as tactics you can use to protect your community's land, water, and energy resources?

- Are there other strategies to explore?

- Are there previous fights against other industrial projects that your community can build from?

Get inspiration from Tucson's recent win against a proposed Amazon data center.

When we look at the wealth and size of Big Tech corporations, it's easy to feel we can never defeat them. But history has shown that when people organize, we can [stop pipeline projects](#), [reject trash-burning incinerators](#), [defeat corporate giants](#), and more.

As a group, watch a short documentary about the recent victory in Tucson, Arizona, where community members organized to defeat Amazon's secretive bid to build a data center in the desert – [Amazon's Secret Plot to Build a Data Center in the Desert](#), More Perfect Union (RT 11:36)

After the film, discuss:

- What methods did the community use to build their fight?

- Who were the different stakeholders involved in the data center project, and who do you think the organizers tried to move?

- Could you see your community coming together like the people of Tucson? Please elaborate.

- What do you think are the next steps for the organizers of this campaign?

ROLLING BACK TAX ABATEMENTS

Decaturish

DeKalb County approves 100-day data center moratorium

By ZOE SEILER   Jul 8, 2025   Comments

A developer has proposed to construct a data center campus at 4358 and 4280 Loveless Place and 2281 Pineview Trail in Ellenwood in DeKalb County.
DEKALB COUNTY/PROVIDED

[St. Charles 1st in nation to ban data center construction citywide for a year](#)
In August 2025, St. Charles, Missouri, became the first in the country to enact a yearlong, citywide moratorium on data center construction. The ban was approved after city residents pushed back on a massive and secretive data center known as "Project Cumulus."

CREATING ZONING RESTRICTIONS

Construction of Amazon Mid-Atlantic Region data center in Loudoun County, Va. Photo by Getty Images

Counties try to keep data center development in bounds

Creating a zoning ordinance to ensure data centers are built within industrial-zoned areas.

REMOVING INDUSTRY MEMBERS FROM CITY ZONING COMMITTEE

Prince William Times

In a victory for residents, data centers yanked from county's data center reform group

By Peter Cary Contributing Writer   Dec 20, 2024 Updated Jul 25, 2025   💬 1

Data centers too close for comfort: Residents members of Prince William County's Data Center Ordinance Advisory Group held a press conference in November in the 150-foot space between a STACK data center and the Regency apartment complex in Manassas to demonstrate how the county's zoning rules are failing residential communities.

Photo by Peter Cary

In a victory for residents, data centers yanked from county's data center reform group - December 20, 2024

Nine members of a City Zoning Committee were ejected for their ties to the data center industry, real estate developers, builders, and utilities. The committee's reorganization made the group "more citizen-focused."

ESTABLISHING CITY WATER ORDINANCE

Mayor Regina Romero and the Tucson City Council approved a city ordinance requiring customers who want to use large quantities of water to apply with the city. The new ordinance will also require those requests to become public records so that community members can access them.

BANNING THE SECRECY OF PUBLIC SUBSIDIES

The New York State Senate

Senate Bill S6394A

2025-2026 Legislative Session

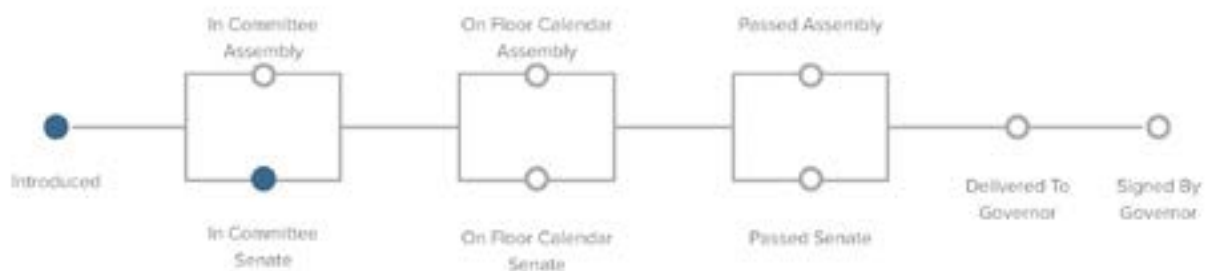Relates to the regulation of energy consumption by data centers

SPONSORED BY

Kristen Gonzalez
(D, WF) 59TH SENATE DISTRICT

CURRENT BILL STATUS -
In Senate Committee Environmental Conservation Committee

Bill S6394A 2025-2026 Legislative Session: Relates to the regulation of energy consumption by data centers.

New York lawmakers introduced the New York State Sustainable Data Centers Act (S6394A) that would require data centers to publicly report their energy and water usage and prohibit them from entering into agreements that keep this information secret.

CREATING LEGISLATION TO PREVENT NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS

The New York State Senate
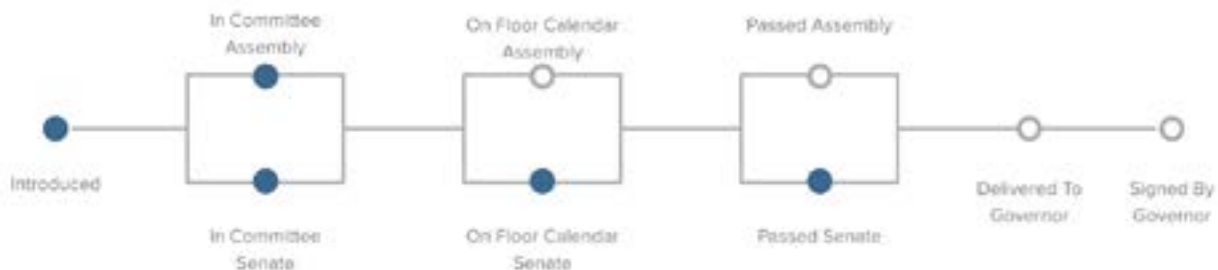
Senate Bill S373

2025-2026 Legislative Session

Prohibits confidentiality and non-disclosure provisions from inclusion in certain contracts entered into by the state or a municipality

SPONSORED BY

Michael Gianaris
(D, WF) 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

CURRENT BILL STATUS -
In Assembly Committee

Introduced — In Committee Senate — In Committee Assembly — On Floor Calendar Senate — On Floor Calendar Assembly — Passed Senate — Passed Assembly — Delivered To Governor — Signed By Governor

Senate Bill S373 2025-2026 Legislative Session Prohibits confidentiality and non-disclosure provisions from inclusion in certain contracts entered into by the state or a municipality

Pending legislation seeks to prevent government entities from using secrecy clauses in economic development contracts, which could impact data centers that receive public subsidies.

Mapping Our Knowledge

(60 - 90 mins)

This activity works best when participants are all from the same community.

Description:

This activity can be used by groups currently fighting a data center or those looking to proactively create measures to protect their land, energy, water, and infrastructure. Participants will work in small groups to research different aspects of a data center project and what they know about their community's approval process and resources.

Materials:

- Research Sheets, pens
- Internet access
- Newsprint, makers

Directions

Research in small groups.

Option #1: For Groups Currently Fighting a Data Center

Divide participants into <u>three</u> groups and give each group one of the Research Sheets:

1. What Do We Know About the Data Center Project?
2. What Do We Know About Our City's Approval Process?
3. What Do We Know About Our Resources?

Option #2: For Groups Not Fighting a Data Center but Looking to Create Measures to Protect Your Resources

Divide participants into <u>two</u> groups and give each group one of the Research Sheets:

1. What Do We Know About Our City's Approval Process?
1. What Do We Know About Our Resources?

Instruct the groups to fill out what they know and research what they need to find out. *Be sure to emphasize that the research can include who or where they could go to get the needed information.*

Share back.

Have all the small groups share what they found. Take clarifying questions and have folks add additional information or resources.

Identify next steps.

On newsprint, keep notes as you discuss as a group:

- What do we have the most knowledge about at this initial research stage?
- Where should our next level of research take us? Is there a particular way in which we'd like to dig deeper?
- Are there other people we should bring into our process at this moment?
- What are some next steps for us as a group?

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT **THE DATA CENTER PROJECT**?

THE PLAYERS

What **CORPORATION** is trying to build the data center (i.e. who is the end user)?

Have they required NDAs? What is their history of building data centers? Have they made any climate commitments? What public narratives are they saying about this project, if any?

Who is the **DEVELOPER** (LLC/shell company) managing the project?

What is their history of building data centers or other industrial projects? What public narratives are they saying about this project?

Who are the **INVESTORS** behind this project?

Do they have any ties to decision-makers in your city?

PROJECT DETAILS

- What is their project budget and scope?
- Where is this project looking to be built?
- What type of energy sources are they trying to use?
- Is there a contract already signed?
- Have they secured any permits?

BRAINSTORM INTERVENTIONS

Ex: Create transparency measures that require corporations to end secret deals and to disclose actual costs and resource usage

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT **OUR CITY'S APPROVAL PROCESS**?

THE PLAYERS

Who has **DECISION-MAKING POWER** in data center development projects?

What is their history with industrial projects, including data centers? Do they have investments or connections in other aspects of data center development?

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Where do your elected officials stand regarding data center development? What narratives do they share about the city budget and economy, and how does the community receive these?

DATA CENTER STAKEHOLDERS
(i.e., Utilities Companies, Economic Development Agencies, etc.)

What is their take on data center development, and how does the community generally respond to their influence?

REGULATORY AGENCIES

Are there any regulatory agencies that monitor city development?

THE DETAILS

- Are there any local ordinances in your community to regulate development?

- Does your state or city offer tax subsidies to tech corporations driving data center construction?

- Are there any other data center projects in your community or neighboring counties?

BRAINSTORM INTERVENTIONS

Ex: Tax Policy Reform; Vote Down Data Center Proposals (often via Zoning Approval Processes)

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT **OUR RESOURCES**?

LAND

- Who owns the proposed property, and is it already in use?
- Does the land have any protections (i.e., tribal lands, conservation, zoning ordinances, etc)
- Who would be directly impacted by development?
- Are there any data centers in the area?

ENERGY

- What types of energy sources power your community, and what companies control them?
- What permits are required to operate the different energy sources?
- How has your community experienced access to energy? Are there any strains on your local power grid?
- Are residents seeing a rise in electric utility bills?

WATER

- Where does your community source its drinkable water supply, and who controls this?
- Do city agencies or independent organizations monitor water consumption, contamination, and conservation?
- How has your community experienced access to water?
- Are residents seeing a rise in water bills?

ENVIRONMENTAL

- What state or city entities monitor health and safety standards for your community?
- Are there independent entities that do this as well?
- What is the history of environmental justice in your community?

PEOPLE

Who are your allies? Can individuals or groups support your fight through research, legal counsel, policy, or organizing?

BRAINSTORM INTERVENTIONS

Ex: Utility Reform – Requiring data center companies to cover the costs of electricity grid expansions and other utility infrastructure that their increased energy use causes.

Glossary of Terms

- **Data Centers** – Data centers are the physical manifestation of our digital activity. They are giant warehouses full of computer servers, chips, and equipment that power AI and other technologies. Data centers consume finite resources, including electricity, water, infrastructure, and land. They exacerbate pollution and destroy necessary ecosystems, leaving local communities to shoulder the environmental and economic costs while tech billionaires and investors profit.

- **Generative AI** – Generative AI produces "new" content, including text, images, and videos, by analyzing and mimicking patterns in vast amounts of our existing data. Training AI requires consuming megawatt-hours or even gigawatt-hours of electricity, enough energy to power thousands of homes for a year. *(Source)*

- **Big Tech** – A blanket term for the world's largest and most influential technology companies. The "Big 5" often refers to five companies – Amazon, Apple, Alphabet (Google), Meta (Facebook), and Microsoft. The "Malicious 7" can be expanded to include Nvidia and Tesla. The concept of Big Tech can also extend to the major Chinese technology firms— Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi— collectively referred to as BATX.

- **The State** – Political organization of society, or the body politic, or, more narrowly, the institutions of government. *(Source)*

- **Nondisclosure agreement (NDA)** – a legally binding contract where two or more parties agree not to disclose certain confidential or proprietary information. Tech corporations often use these to prevent opportunities for communities to research or to solicit independent expert assessments.

- **Disinformation** – Deliberately false or misleading information, often spread for political gain, profit, or to discredit a target individual, group, movement, or political party.

- **Greenwashing** – the act of making false or misleading statements about the environmental benefits of a product or practice. It can be a way for companies to continue or expand their polluting and related harmful behaviors, all while gaming the system or profiting off well-intentioned, sustainably minded consumers. *(Source)*

Resources

TOOLS TO TRACK DATA CENTERS

- [Fractracker Alliance](#) – national data center tracker
- [Honor the Earth Data Center Tracker](#) - tracking data centers on/near Indigenous lands

ORGANIZING RESOURCES

- [The Costs of Data Centers to Our Communities—And How to Fight Back](#) is an organizing guide from Kairos and MediaJustice. (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#))
- [North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit: State and Local Policy Interventions to Stop Rampant AI Data Center Expansion](#) from AI Now Institute
- [No Data Centers on Native Land! Organizer Toolkit](#) from Honor the Earth
- [The Hidden Costs of Data Centers](#) is a report from Citizens Action Coalition, featuring a description of data center subsidies and case studies of data centers in Indiana and Virginia.
- [Good Job First's Subsidizer Tracker](#) can help you track how much revenue your state is losing to data centers.
- [The Center for Oil and Gas Organizing](#) is a watchdog to US federal agencies like the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the Department of Energy (DOE) to hold them accountable on gas export (LNG) and interstate pipeline decisions. Their [Frontlines to FERC campaign](#) amplifies the voices of community residents directly impacted by proposed interstate natural gas pipelines and LNG export facilities.
- The Institute for Local Self-Reliance's [Public Power Handbook](#) is a guide for communities exploring models of publicly owned power, such as a municipal electric utility, as a path toward local control, clean and affordable energy investment, and democratic accountability.

CLIMATE & TECH GREENWASHING

- [AI Threats to Climate Change](#), Climate Action Against Disinformation
- [Burns Trust: The Amazon Unsustainability Report](#), Amazon Employees for Climate Justice
- [Google's Eco-Failures: An Environmental Investigation into Alphabet Inc. 2025](#), Kairos

SUBSIDIES

- [Money Lost to the Cloud: How Data Centers Benefit from State and Local Government Subsidies](#), Good Jobs First
- [Cloudy With a Loss of Spending Control: How Data Centers Are Endangering State Budgets](#), Good Jobs First

ADDITIONAL READING

- [WTF: The Rise of the Tech Broligarchy](#) - [Videos](#) and [Toolkit](#), MediaJustice
- [Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI](#), Karen Hao
- [America's Digital Demand Threatens Black Communities with More Pollution](#), CapitalB

About Us

MediaJustice≡

MediaJustice builds power to challenge how corporations and governments use media and technology to shape our collective future. We connect movements fighting corporate control, analyze how tech enables harmful policies, and amplify community-led alternatives to surveillance and extraction.

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We need your feedback!

After using this toolkit, please take a moment to share your experience using this brief survey.