

DATA CENTERS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

**An Executive Guide for HBCU
College and University Presidents**

2026



www.qem.org



<https://www.1890foundation.org/>

Table of contents

1. Toolkit Purpose & Breifing Overview	2
2. What is a Data Center?	5
3. Why a Data Center?	9
4. What does a Data Center Require?	14
5. What are Potential Community Concerns?	15
6. What are Financial Models?	17
7. What are Potential Risks?	18
8. What is the Academic Proposition?	19
9. 10 Questions to Ask Before Proceeding	20
10. What to Ask Developers & the Red Flags	20

APPENDICES

Data Center 101 Vocabulary	24
Communications Tools	29
State Data Center Resource Guide	42
References	45



PURPOSE OF THE BRIEF

Provide presidents and senior leadership teams with a concise explanation of what data centers are, why higher education institutions are increasingly considering them, what institutional resources they require, and the major questions that should be answered before pursuing development.

DATA CENTERS: A STRATEGIC BRIEFING FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

This toolkit is based on a full collection of resources including practitioner guides from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National League of Cities, as well as academic literature examining energy, water use, cooling technologies, grid integration, legal considerations, and geopolitical implications. Several consistent themes emerge that are directly relevant to institutional decision-making. This report presents the themes that are particularly important for colleges and universities considering when exploring whether to host a data center, expand institutional research-computing capacity, pursue external partnerships, or prepare for broader community discussions surrounding data center development.

Demand is growing faster than almost anyone expected, and AI is the driver. Across nearly every source, artificial intelligence is identified as the dominant force behind data center growth. U.S. data centers consumed an estimated 176 terawatt-hours in 2023 (about 4 percent of national electricity demand), a share projected to reach 6–12 percent by 2028. Global demand for data center capacity is expected to triple by 2030, with AI responsible for roughly 70 percent of that growth¹. One modeling study projects U.S. data center CO₂ emissions could rise up to 1.9 percent by 2030 from this growth alone¹, and geopolitical analysts frame this surge as tied to international competition over AI infrastructure and energy security.



For a president, the implication is that any campus computing strategy is now inseparable from energy strategy. Additionally, the broader market is also growing fast, the global Internet data center market was estimated at USD 59.3 billion in 2020 and is projected to reach USD 143.4 billion by 2027 (a 13.4 percent compound annual growth rate), with the U.S. market alone estimated at USD 16 billion by 2020 and China's market projected to reach USD 32 billion by 2027². This growth trajectory is the underlying driver behind the local capital investment, jobs, and tax-revenue dynamics described above.

Resource strain, especially water, is a reputational as well as an operational risk. Energy gets the headlines, but water consumption is a quieter, growing concern: nearly two-thirds of new U.S. data centers since 2022 sit in high water-stress regions, and one major AI company draws roughly 80 percent of its on-site cooling water from potable supplies. Academic water-footprint research confirms this is a genuine trade-off with energy efficiency; for example, cooling methods that lower a facility's power use effectiveness (PUE) sometimes raise its water use, and vice versa^{3,4}. Any institution touting sustainability commitments should expect data center partnerships or expansions to be scrutinized on this exact axis.

A single data center building can represent hundreds of millions in capital investment and roughly 50 jobs.

The facility “type” chosen is a strategic and not just technical decision. The literature converges on the same five-way taxonomy: enterprise (owned, full control), colocation/managed (shared, lower capital cost), hyperscale (massive, most energy-efficient at scale), edge (small, low-

latency), and modular (portable, temporary). Efficiency data show hyperscale facilities substantially outperform smaller enterprise centers on PUE (roughly 1.1–1.3 versus 1.5–1.6), which is why the U.S. Department of Energy's national study found major energy savings from shifting workloads into hyperscale-class facilities⁵.



A real precedent for higher education exists through the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), or the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne which operates its own campus data center, shares infrastructure with a neighboring university, and recovers about 95 percent of the facility's waste heat to supply campus building heat which turns a cost center into a partial sustainability asset⁶.

Data centers are being reframed as grid assets, not just grid burdens. A newer strand of research argues data centers can provide power-system flexibility particularly shifting or curtailing load to help stabilize renewable-heavy grids, rather than simply straining them⁷. This “flexible workload” framing, paired with the EPFL heat-recovery example, suggests a middle path between refusing data center involvement and accepting undifferentiated growth.

Local authority is real but increasingly contested. Municipalities (and by extension host institutions) retain zoning, siting, noise, and lighting authority, and can extract meaningful fiscal benefits but construction phases bring real disruption (up to 1,500 workers on-site, months of elevated traffic), and state and federal preemption trends are actively narrowing local control. Legal and financing literature underscores that these projects are capital-intensive and contractually complex, which matters if the university would be a landlord, co-investor, or long-term counterparty rather than a passive neighbor⁸.

Bottom line for leadership. The recurring throughline is that scale and technology choice (hyperscale-class efficiency, advanced cooling, heat recovery, siting in favorable power markets) determine most of the environmental and cost outcome, which is more than whether a data center exists at all. That gives a university real leverage, specifically the decision of how to engage (own, share, host, or decline) matters as much as whether to engage, and the EPFL example shows a research university can turn a data center into a teaching case, a research asset, and a partial sustainability solution simultaneously.

WHAT IS A DATA CENTER?

A data center is a physical facility that houses the information technology (IT) infrastructure which could include servers, storage, and networking gear all used to build, run, and deliver digital applications and services, while also storing and managing the data those services generate⁹. Data centers are not new: everyday activities like online banking, cloud storage, browsing the internet, and hailing a rideshare all depend on them. Beyond servers, a data center includes the power delivery, backup generation, and cooling systems needed to keep equipment running around the clock, since even brief interruptions can disrupt services and cause financial losses. What has changed is scale. AI and cloud growth is accelerating demand for capacity, projected to triple globally by 2030, with AI driving about 70 percent of that growth.



What Is a Data Center?

PEOPLE + INFRASTRUCTURE + DATA = A BRIGHTER CONNECTED WORLD



A **data center** is a physical facility that houses the information technology (IT) infrastructure used to build, run, and deliver digital applications and services. It can include servers, storage, and networking gear, while also storing and managing the data those services generate.



KEEPS INFORMATION
SECURE



ENABLES EVERYDAY
DIGITAL SERVICES



BUILDS A MORE
CONNECTED TOMORROW



DATA
POWERS
POSSIBILITIES

Data Center Designs

Designs fall into five categories, and one company often uses several:

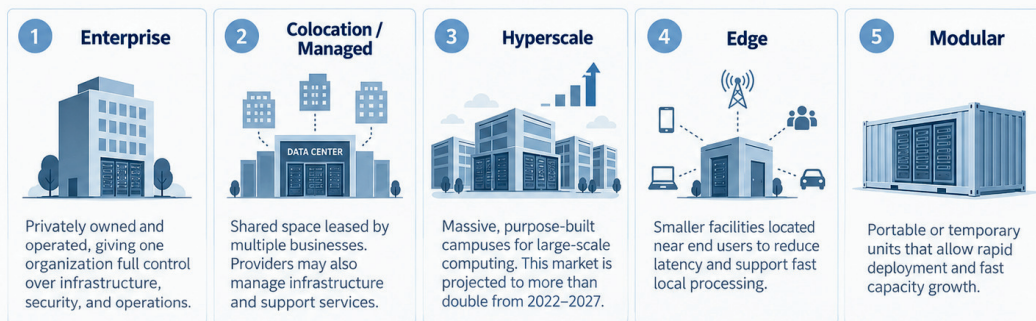
- **Enterprise** (privately owned, full control)
- **Colocation/Managed** (shared space leased by multiple businesses)
- **Hyperscale** (massive, purpose-built campuses for large-scale computing, a market projected to more than double from 2022–2027)
- **Edge** (smaller, located near end users to cut latency)
- **Modular** (portable, temporary units for rapid capacity growth)

Types of Data Center Designs

Five facility categories and three major cooling approaches



One company may use several of these designs.



All facility types can use any of these cooling approaches.

Cooling Approaches

Cooling design shapes energy and water performance regardless of facility category.



Air Cooling

Uses conditioned air to remove heat from IT equipment.



Direct Liquid Cooling

Circulates liquid through cold plates at the server to remove heat more directly and efficiently.



Immersion Cooling

Submerges IT equipment in a non-conductive liquid that absorbs heat.



Data center design is defined by both facility type and cooling approach.

PEOPLE | TECHNOLOGY | A STRONGER TOMORROW

Design also varies by cooling approach with either the use of air, direct liquid, and immersion cooling. These cooling designs shape energy and water performance regardless of facility category.

Types of Data Center Models most relevant to Colleges and Universities include:

- **Institutional (enterprise) model.** A university can own and operate its own on-campus data center, the “enterprise” type in the toolkit’s typology, giving the institution full control over its IT infrastructure, similar to how any single organization would run a private facility. EPFL follows this model, running roughly 4 MW of campus data center capacity (with plans to add another 4 MW) to serve its own research-computing clusters⁶.

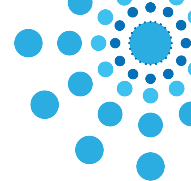
- **Shared or consortium model.** Institutions can pool infrastructure with a neighboring school rather than build alone. EPFL's data center facilities are shared with the adjacent University of Lausanne (UNIL), with some servers even hosted off-site, spreading capital cost and utilization across two institutions⁶.
- **Colocation or outsourcing (cloud) model.** Rather than build capacity, a college can lease space in a shared colocation facility or send computing workloads out to external cloud/hyperscale providers or what the EPFL study terms "data import"⁵. This shifts costs from capital expenditure to ongoing operating expenditure and lets an institution size its own data center to only its base workload⁹.
- **Hybrid, campus-integrated model.** The EPFL analysis found the lowest combined cost and lowest emissions when the campus processed a majority (but not all) of its data in-house (around 160–245 MJ/m² of in-house processing in different scenarios) while outsourcing overflow demand to the cloud. This in-house data center was also tied into EPFL's district heating network, recovering roughly 95 percent of the heat the data center generates to help supply campus building heat and hot water, turning the facility into an energy asset rather than a pure cost center⁶.
- **Edge or modular add-ons.** For smaller or temporary computing needs (e.g., a specific research initiative), the toolkit's edge (proximity-focused, low-latency) and modular (portable, temporary) designs could supplement a main campus facility without the investment of a full build-out.

KEY MESSAGE FOR EXECUTIVES

A data center is not simply another academic building. It is a major infrastructure asset requiring significant electricity, cooling, telecommunications capacity, cybersecurity, capital investment, and long-term operational planning.

WHY MIGHT A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY WANT A DATA CENTER?

- **Research Capacity.** A campus data center can strengthen institutional competitiveness.
- **Workforce Development.** The facility can become a teaching and training environment for students pursuing careers.
- **Economic Development.** A data center could strengthen partnerships with technology companies, utilities, state economic-development organizations, federal agencies, and regional employers.
- **Energy Asset.** A data center can function as an energy asset by flexibly managing electricity demand, integrating renewable power, providing grid-support services, and recovering waste heat for productive use.
- **Institutional Technology Infrastructure.** Universities increasingly depend upon computational capacity for research, teaching, student services, enterprise systems, cybersecurity, and AI.
- **Potential Revenue.** Depending upon the ownership structure, institutions may generate revenue through leases, research partnerships, commercial tenants, land agreements, utility arrangements, or public-private partnerships.



Research Capacity

A campus data center can strengthen institutional competitiveness in fields such as:

- Artificial intelligence, engineering, cybersecurity, computational science, health research, climate science, advanced manufacturing, quantum-related research, and data science.

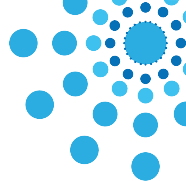
It may also increase the institution's ability to compete for federally funded research requiring advanced computing infrastructure.

Workforce Development

The facility can become a teaching and training environment for students pursuing careers in:

- IT infrastructure, electrical engineering, computer engineering, cybersecurity, AI, cloud computing, data science, networking, facilities management, and energy systems.

Data centers place comparatively modest demands on services relative to other large developments; for example, minimal added traffic, no added school-age population, and low ongoing service strain each making data centers a relatively low-friction use for underutilized or surplus college-owned land. Construction and operations also generate workforce opportunities in electrical, HVAC, and security trades into which colleges with technical or workforce-development programs could feed directly. Notably, the literature already classifies education institutions, alongside finance, as a common category of organization that runs "internal" data centers to support their own administrative and productivity needs, distinct from companies that sell IT services commercially⁵.



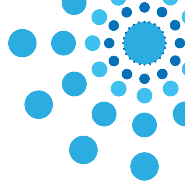
Economic Development

A data center could strengthen partnerships with technology companies, utilities, state economic-development organizations, federal agencies, and regional employers. For some institutions, the facility could become an anchor for a larger technology or innovation district surrounding the campus. Capital investment is the headline number.

Incentives can significantly influence data center siting, including sales-tax exemptions, property-tax abatements, energy advantages, and negotiated PILOT agreements that balance investment attraction with local revenue generation.

According to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Data Center Toolkit, a single 250,000-square-foot data center represents roughly \$975 million in capital investment with about \$600 million for construction and buildout, \$250 million for equipment, and \$125 million for network/grid improvements⁹. Because facilities are often built as multi-building campuses, a site supporting five data centers could see initial investment of up to \$4.88 billion. Investment doesn't stop after construction, either, because chips burn out and become obsolete, operators typically refresh equipment every five years, replacing about \$300 million in gear each cycle, a recurring, not one-time, source of economic activity, but also cost to the institution.

Any tax revenue flows mainly through real estate. For local governments, school districts, and counties, the primary revenue source is the real estate tax on the improved property, which reflects the scale of capital investment;

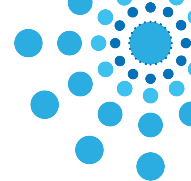


the actual amount depends on assessed value and the local millage rate. Smaller additional revenue can come from mercantile or business privilege taxes, local services taxes, and occupation or earned income taxes where applicable⁹. The Pennsylvania toolkit frames data centers as fiscally attractive in part because they place fewer demands on municipal services than many other land uses because they don't generate the same school enrollment, public safety, or recreational-facility pressure that residential development would, and their limited deliveries and small on-site workforce mean less off-site traffic burden than typical commercial development⁹. This makes data centers a favored option for redeveloping older, underutilized, or obsolete commercial sites, such as former shopping malls.

Energy Asset

Nearly all the electricity a data center consumes is dissipated as heat like in EPFL's case, about 95 percent, most of it recoverable. The study modeled feeding that recovered heat into a district heating network already serving campus buildings, supplying space heating and hot water rather than being wasted⁶. That reframes a data center from a pure environmental liability into a piece of campus energy infrastructure that can lower heating costs elsewhere. Because computing workloads are more flexible than most building loads, a campus data center can be scheduled to soak up excess solar generation rather than exporting or curtailing it as seen in EPFL's modeling which showed flexible workloads could raise self-consumption of on-site renewables and cut curtailment by up to 28 percent⁶. Colocating a data center with campus renewables also reduces the facility's own footprint and the burden it places on the wider grid.





Institutional Technology Infrastructure

Universities increasingly depend upon computational capacity for research, teaching, student services, enterprise systems, cybersecurity, and AI. Owning or partnering in a data center could provide increased control over institutional technology infrastructure. The clearest evidence comes from the EPFL case study. Its model found that a university with no on-site data center faces the highest total costs (up to about 50 CHF/m²/year) because all computing and storage has to be “imported” from external cloud servers, with that import cost alone running roughly 35 CHF/m²/year. Installing an in-house data center immediately reduces total costs by cutting reliance on that external processing and improving overall energy efficiency⁶. For a research university with growing computational needs, owning some capacity is a hedge against ever-rising cloud bills.

Potential Revenue

Depending upon the ownership structure, institutions may generate revenue through leases, research partnerships, commercial tenants, land agreements, utility arrangements, or public-private partnerships. For an institution weighing whether to host, lease land for, or develop a facility, the fiscal case is substantial. A multi-building campus can represent billions in capital investment, each facility supports roughly 50 jobs (with direct hires earning around \$100,000), and real estate tax revenue flows to local governments and school districts based on the improved property's assessed value. States are also actively incentivizing this activity, for example, Pennsylvania exempts qualifying data center equipment from sales and use tax⁹ which lowers the cost of operating a certified facility.

KEY MESSAGE FOR EXECUTIVES

CAUTION--Revenue opportunities should not be assumed. The financial model must account for construction, energy consumption, cooling, maintenance, staffing, equipment replacement, security, and financing.



WHAT DOES A DATA CENTER REQUIRE FROM THE UNIVERSITY?

What Does a Data Center Require From the University?

Key infrastructure, operational, and planning considerations for campus leaders

DATA
PEOPLE
PURPOSE
PROGRESS

HIGHER
EDUCATION
STRONGER
TOMORROW

PEOPLE + INFRASTRUCTURE + INNOVATION + A STRONGER TOMORROW

This is one of the most important questions for any institution considering a campus data center.

1



Electrical Capacity

Data centers consume significantly more electricity than traditional academic buildings.

- Current campus electrical capacity
- Available utility capacity
- Need for new substations or transmission infrastructure
- Reliability and redundancy requirements
- Potential impact on campus energy costs
- Opportunities for renewable or alternative energy



For AI-focused facilities, power availability may determine whether the project is feasible at all.

2



Cooling and Water

Computing equipment generates substantial heat.

- Air cooling
- Chilled-water systems
- Liquid cooling
- Cooling towers
- Significant water resources



Leaders should understand the potential impact on institutional utilities and surrounding communities.



3



Fiber and Telecommunications

A successful data center requires high-capacity and redundant network connectivity.

- Proximity to major fiber networks
- Access to multiple telecommunications providers



4



Physical Space

The location must support the facility itself and the infrastructure around it.

- Data center buildings
- Electrical infrastructure
- Backup generation
- Cooling infrastructure
- Security zones
- Equipment delivery
- Expansion



Campus leaders should consider whether the land is more valuable for academic, residential, athletic, research, or future development purposes.



5



Security and Resilience

A data center may require substantially greater protections than a typical campus building.



Cybersecurity



Physical access



Emergency power



Fire suppression



Disaster recovery



Network redundancy



Severe weather planning



Operational continuity

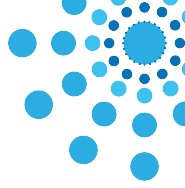


A campus data center is more than a building – it is a long-term infrastructure, energy, technology, and risk-management commitment.



STRONGER
INSTITUTIONS
BRIGHTER
POSSIBILITIES

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL COMMUNITY CONCERNS?



Environmental Concerns

Hyperscale facilities tend to be least harmful per unit of computing. The Department of Energy’s national data center energy study found that shifting workloads from small, dispersed facilities into hyperscale centers cuts total energy use, since large operators achieve much better power usage effectiveness (PUE) which is the ratio of total facility energy to energy delivered to computing equipment⁵. Typical enterprise centers run PUE near 1.5–1.6, while hyperscale facilities fall below 1.3, some near 1.09. Benefits grow further when hyperscale sites add immersion or closed-loop cooling and colocate with renewables, cutting both energy and water use. One caveat is that lower-PUE cooling sometimes raises water usage, so the “greenest” design also depends on climate and cooling technology, not size alone.

Noise

Data centers can emit noise comparable to industrial or manufacturing facilities, largely from cooling fans and periodic backup-generator testing. Communities have specifically raised concerns about cooling-fan noise, and best practice calls for noise studies and standards addressing both continuous and intermittent noise near residential or campus buildings, typically with exemptions carved out for genuine emergency generator use^{9,10}.

Light pollution and visual impact

Facilities that run continuously generate significant exterior lighting, so neighbors may push back on light spilling onto adjacent properties. The toolkit recommends photometric plans, full cut-off fixtures, capped pole heights, and maximum light levels at property lines. Because the buildings themselves are large, expansive,



and visually industrial, landscaping, visual buffers, or screening walls are also recommended to soften their appearance near other campus or community uses.

Construction disruption (temporary, but real)

While a data center's ongoing traffic is relatively light, a president should still expect a genuinely disruptive construction period as a hyperscale-class campuses can have up to 1,500 workers on-site at peak, generating substantial vehicle trips for both materials and personnel over a build-out lasting several years. Traffic studies and, where needed, temporary traffic management should be anticipated.

Air quality and health near backup generators

Backup generators which are used to reduce grid load during peak demand can emit substantial nitrogen oxides and other air pollutants, a legitimate local air-quality and health concern for anyone living or working near the facility.

Strain on the regional power grid and utility bills

Large hyperscale or colocation facilities can strain regional power grids and raise electricity prices for other ratepayers which could be a concern that would extend to the college's own utility bills and to surrounding households and businesses, not just the facility itself.

Water use and equity, especially under scarcity

AI-driven data centers can consume enormous volumes of water for cooling and on-site electricity generation, and city/institutional leaders are urged to weigh this carefully in water-stressed regions where a data center's draw could compete with other community and campus water needs.

Gaps between sustainability commitments and reality

While large operators like Amazon and Microsoft have made renewable-energy and carbon-neutrality commitments, many smaller facilities lack the capital to pursue similar strategies. A president partnering with a less-resourced operator should be prepared to explain how that gap will be managed if the college has its own sustainability pledges to uphold.

WHAT ARE FINANCIAL MODELS?



Building a Strong Business Case for a University Data Center

Presidents should require a comprehensive business case before committing institutional land, debt capacity, or capital. Evaluate four key categories:

DATA.
PEOPLE.
POSSIBILITY.
A STRONGER
TOMORROW.



CAPITAL COSTS

WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD

- Site preparation
- Buildings
- Electrical infrastructure
- Cooling
- Networking
- Security
- Computing equipment



OPERATING COSTS

WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN

- Electricity
- Water
- Staffing
- Maintenance
- Cybersecurity
- Insurance
- Telecommunications
- Equipment replacement



REVENUE SOURCES

HOW IT CAN GENERATE VALUE

- Commercial tenants
- Research grants
- Industry partnerships
- Leasing arrangements
- Government investment
- Philanthropy
- Internal university funding



OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

HOW IT CAN BE ORGANIZED

- Institution owns the facility
- Lease land to a developer
- Public-private partnership
- Joint venture
- Academic/research partner (without owning the physical infrastructure)



A rigorous analysis across these four categories will help university leaders assess risks, opportunities, and long-term value before moving forward.

STRATEGIC
INFRASTRUCTURE
FOR A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW.

KEY QUESTION FOR EXECUTIVES

Is the institution trying to own a data center, benefit from having a data center nearby, or use a data center as part of a larger research and economic-development strategy?

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL RISKS?



Executive Risk Matrix for a University Data Center

Key risks presidents and senior leaders should assess before moving forward.

DATA.
PEOPLE.
OPPORTUNITY.
A STRONGER
TOMORROW.



Financial Risk

Construction and operating costs may exceed projections.



Energy Risk

Local utilities may not have sufficient capacity or may require expensive infrastructure improvements.



Technology Risk

Computing equipment and cooling technologies can become obsolete rapidly.



Environmental Risk

Energy and water consumption can create sustainability challenges or community opposition.



Land-Use Risk

The institution could commit valuable campus property to a facility with limited academic integration.



Partnership Risk

Long-term agreements with private developers may constrain future university decisions.



Cybersecurity Risk

Concentrated digital infrastructure increases the importance of cybersecurity and physical protection.



Mission Risk

A commercially attractive project may have limited connection to teaching, research, workforce development, or the institution's strategic plan.



A strong business case should evaluate institutional fit, infrastructure demands, and long-term risk alongside potential opportunity.

HIGHER
POSSIBILITIES.
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW.

- Research demonstrates financial and partnership risks show financing/PPA and site-rights agreements can bind institutions long-term⁸.
- Energy risks include real interconnection queues and multi-year substation/transmission upgrade timelines^{11,8}.
- Technology risk discussed in the research describes rapid server obsolescence (“zombie” servers)⁵.
- Environmental and land-use risk is discussed in the Pennsylvania Data Center Toolkit which covers water/noise impacts, zoning, decommissioning, and community-expectation planning⁹.
- Cybersecurity risk research call grid-facing cybersecurity an “emerging,” unresolved research area for Executives to be aware¹¹.



WHAT IS THE ACADEMIC PROPOSITION?

**École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), or the Swiss Federal
Institute of Technology Lausanne: A Case Study**

École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne's (EPFL) owns a campus data center and a Research Computing Platform (RCP) whose data center models the ability to serve as heat-active urban energy prosumers⁵. The model and design of EPFL permit in-house capacity for growing research computing demands. EPFL's on-campus data center directly serves the university's own Research Computing Platform, and the researchers note that campus ICT demand "is expected to grow" as large language models and AI-driven research expand while making local infrastructure increasingly important for keeping pace with faculty and student research needs rather than relying entirely on external cloud providers⁵.

The EPFL model also includes a living laboratory for the institution's own research. The research of Ravi, et al., (2026) is evidence of this value. The EPFL researchers used their own campus's data center and district heating infrastructure as the empirical case study for a peer-reviewed energy-systems paper, demonstrating how an on-campus facility can double as a testbed for interdisciplinary research in energy engineering, sustainability, and computer science⁵

Outlined in the EPFL research study, sustainability and decarbonization gains were realized for the campus. The study found that with exergy-aware heat recovery, the data center's waste heat could supply up to 40% of the campus's district heating demand, with up to 60% of rejected heat recoverable for productive use; for example, turning a facility often seen as an energy liability into a contributor toward institutional carbon-reduction goals.

According to the EPFL study, renewable energy integration and data self-sufficiency were significant outcomes. EPFL found flexible, on-campus computing workloads could be shifted to align with on-site solar generation, raising PV self-consumption to as much as 90% in flexible scenarios, while processing more data locally ("in-house") rather than outsourcing to the cloud. The study found this increased data self-sufficiency (up to 60% in off-grid scenarios). It then becomes a relevant proposition to institutions wanting more control over sensitive research data and progress on renewable-energy commitments simultaneously.



10 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE PROCEEDING

1. What institutional problem or strategic opportunity would this data center address?
2. Who will own, finance, operate, and maintain the facility?
3. How much electricity will the facility require, and can the local utility provide it?
4. What are the anticipated capital and annual operating costs?
5. What revenues or cost savings are realistically projected?
6. What academic, research, and workforce benefits will students and faculty receive?
7. What campus land and infrastructure must be committed?
8. What environmental and community impacts should be anticipated?
9. What contractual or financial obligations would remain if the technology or partnership changes?
10. How does this project advance the institution's strategic plan over the next 10–20 years?

QUESTIONS TO ASK DEVELOPER & RED FLAGS

1. Who bears the risk if financing or the power purchase agreement falls through, and what are our exit rights?



Developer can't clearly explain financing contingencies or exit terms, or says the university would inherit obligations if the deal collapses.

- 
2. What is the realistic timeline and cost for grid interconnection, and who pays for any substation or transmission upgrades?

 *Developer is vague on interconnection timeline and costs, or expects the campus/utility to absorb transmission and substation upgrade expenses.*

3. Will this facility bring new, additive power generation, or will it draw down capacity shared with the rest of campus and the surrounding grid?

 *Developer says power will simply be pulled from existing grid capacity, with no plan for new generation or capacity guarantees.*

4. How much water will the facility use, what cooling technology will be deployed, and how does that affect our campus water supply and sustainability commitments?

 *Developer can't specify water source, volume, or cooling technology, or dismisses water impact as negligible without supporting data.*

5. What is the equipment refresh cycle, and who funds upgrades or absorbs the cost of stranded/obsolete infrastructure?

 *Developer won't commit to who funds equipment refresh cycles, or stays silent on handling obsolete, stranded infrastructure costs.*

6. What are the decommissioning terms if the facility closes or the lease ends to include electronic-waste disposal and site restoration?

Developer has no defined decommissioning, e-waste, or site-restoration plan, or defers all responsibility to the institution later.

7. What cybersecurity and physical security protections will be in place, and who is liable for a breach?

Developer offers only generic assurances on cybersecurity and physical security, without specifics on protocols, audits, or breach liability.

8. What noise, lighting, traffic, and construction-phase impacts should we expect, and how will community concerns be handled?

Developer minimizes noise, traffic, or construction disruption concerns and has no concrete community engagement or mitigation plan.

9. How, specifically, will this facility create research computing capacity, curricular, workforce, or teaching opportunities for our students and faculty and not just lease revenue?

Presidents should treat vague answers here as confirmation of the “mission risk” flagged earlier: a commercially attractive deal with little real connection to teaching, research, or strategic plan. Developer pivots to revenue and job numbers but can't describe concrete research, teaching, or workforce partnership commitments.

10. How, specifically, will this facility create research computing capacity, curricular, workforce, or teaching opportunities for our students and faculty and not just lease revenue?



Presidents should treat vague answers here as confirmation of the “mission risk” flagged earlier: a commercially attractive deal with little real connection to teaching, research, or strategic plan. Developer pivots to revenue and job numbers but can’t describe concrete research, teaching, or workforce partnership commitments.

APPENDICES

Data Center 101 Vocabulary

Basic Concepts

Data center: A physical facility that houses the IT infrastructure (servers, storage, and networking) used to build, run, and deliver applications and services, while also storing and managing the associated data.

Hyperscale shift: A scenario in which server workloads are consolidated out of small, dispersed data centers and into large hyperscale facilities to capture efficiency gains

Facility Types

Colocation (or managed) data center: A facility shared by multiple businesses that lease space and hardware within it, trading direct control for cost savings.

Edge data center: A smaller facility located close to the people and businesses it serves, reducing communication delays.

Enterprise data center: A private data center used for the benefit of one company or organization, offering full operational control.

Hyperscale data center: A massive, purpose-built facility for large-scale computing and storage, serving a single tenant or many, built for scalability.

Modular data center: A smaller, portable data center used as a temporary solution when an organization needs to rapidly add capacity.

Server closet / server room / point-of-presence (POP): Very small internal or service-provider computing spaces (under 1,000 square feet) that lean on existing building power and cooling rather than dedicated infrastructure^{5,10}.

APPENDICES

Efficiency and Cooling Terms

Closed-loop cooling: A system that recycles water rather than continuously drawing new supply, reducing the amount “consumed.”

Evaporative cooling: A cooling method that consumes water without recovering it.

Free cooling / air-side economization: Using outside air to cool servers instead of mechanical refrigeration, most effective in cold climates⁴.

Immersion cooling: Submerging servers directly in fluid to improve heat transfer and energy efficiency.

Non-evaporative cooling: Typically uses more electricity but less water.

Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE): The ratio of total facility electricity consumption to the electricity consumed by IT equipment alone; a value of 1.0 means all facility energy reaches the computing equipment, so a lower PUE means greater efficiency¹¹.

Water footprint: A measure of the total water consumed and polluted, directly and indirectly, across a data center's operations⁴.

Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE): A companion metric to PUE used to evaluate a data center's water efficiency, often analyzed alongside PUE because the two can trade off against each other^{12,5}.

Grid and Energy Terms

Backup generators: On-site generation (often diesel or natural gas) needed to reduce grid load during high-demand periods, but a source of nitrogen oxide and other air pollutant emissions that can pose respiratory health risks nearby. Cleaner alternatives like hydrogen fuel cells, and on-site renewables are being explored to cut these emissions^{11,10}.

APPENDICES

CAPEX, OPEX, and TOTEX: Capital expenditure (the upfront cost of building infrastructure like the data center, PV panels, and heat pumps), operating expenditure (ongoing costs such as imported electricity and outsourced data processing), and total expenditure, the sum of the two, used to find the most cost-effective mix of in-house versus outsourced computing⁶.

Chiller coefficient of performance (COP): A measure of a chiller's cooling efficiency; systems with lower COP values require more electricity per unit of cooling, which is one reason some low-water cooling methods have higher PUE^{12,5}.

Curtailement: The reduction or wasting of renewable electricity generation when supply exceeds what the grid or a facility can use; flexible data center workloads can reduce renewable curtailement by absorbing that excess power⁶.

Data import: Term used for outsourcing data processing to external cloud servers rather than handling it in-house⁶.

Demand-side flexibility / flexibility assets: The capability of data centers to shift or adjust their power consumption to help balance variable renewable generation on the grid⁷.

District heating network (DHN): A shared piped network that distributes heat, including data center waste heat, to multiple buildings for space heating and hot water⁶.

Electric distribution company (EDC): The utility that Pennsylvania residents and businesses interface with directly to receive and pay for power supply.

Embodied emissions: Emissions attributable to manufacturing and installing equipment, such as additional PV panels, batteries, or a larger data center, rather than to its ongoing operation; these can offset operational emissions savings as facility size grows⁶.

APPENDICES

Energy prosumer: A facility, such as a data center, that both consumes energy and produces or exports usable energy, for example, recovered heat, rather than only drawing from the grid⁶.

Exergy: A measure of the “useful” quality of recovered heat, not just its quantity, used to compare heat-recovery strategies for how effectively they can generate power or useful heating from a data center’s waste heat⁶.

Global Warming Potential (GWP): The emissions metric used to compare a data center configuration's climate impact across different design and operating scenarios⁶.

Interconnection agreement: An agreement a data center secures from its electric distribution company (EDC) indicating how much power the system can deliver, including nominal (average) and peak (maximum) load requirements.

Nominal (average) load vs. peak (maximum) load: The two power-demand figures a data center must report to its utility: nominal load is the typical/average draw, while peak load is the maximum possible draw the distribution system must be able to support⁹.

Organic Rankine Cycle (ORC): A heat-to-electricity conversion technology that can use a data center's recovered waste heat to generate additional electricity before that heat is sent on to a district heating network⁶.

Power mix: The combination of energy sources (coal, gas, nuclear, renewables, etc.) supplying a given grid region; it is a major driver of how much CO₂ a data center's electricity use actually generates and is forecast to vary significantly by U.S. state¹.

Rack power density: The amount of power drawn per server rack, ranging from about 7–10 kW/rack in conventional facilities to 30 kW to over 100 kW/rack in dense AI/GPU clusters; higher density drives the shift toward liquid and immersion cooling¹¹.

APPENDICES

Terawatt-hour (TWh) / Megawatt (MW): Standard units for measuring data center electricity consumption and generation capacity at scale; U.S. data centers used an estimated 176 TWh in 2023, and individual hyperscale campuses can now be planned at the gigawatt (GW) scale^{10,11}.

Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) and topology (N, N+1, 2N, 2(N+1)): The backup electrical system that keeps IT equipment running during outages. "N" topology has no redundancy or spare capacity, making it vulnerable to interruptions if a UPS unit fails; "N+1" adds one spare unit; "2N" and "2(N+1)" duplicate the entire power delivery path for the highest reliability⁷.

Zoning and Legal Terms

By-right use (permitted use): A use class within a zoning district deemed acceptable to the community and allowed under general standards, with no special conditions attached.

Conditional use / special exception: Zoning classifications requiring extra review and approval by the governing body (conditional use) or the Zoning Hearing Board (special exception) before a project can proceed.

Dillon's Rule: The legal doctrine that a municipality may exercise only the powers explicitly granted to it by the state legislature, which must be strictly construed.

Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT): A negotiated payment a data center makes to a locality to fund services when it sits in a tax-abated district.

Preemption: A legal limitation on municipal authority in which state or federal law overrides local zoning and permitting power.

Tax Abatement: Local agreement that lowers or removes property taxes for a set number of years.

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Purpose. This adaptable plan helps college and university presidents communicate responsibly, consistently, and transparently when exploring, announcing, developing, or operating a campus data center. It is designed for institutions considering an institution-owned facility, a shared/consortium facility, a colocation arrangement, a land lease, or a public-private partnership.

Use bracketed text such as [Institution Name] and [Project Name] as placeholders. Do not release final materials until campus leadership, legal counsel, facilities, information technology, finance, sustainability, government relations, and the project partner have verified all project-specific facts, commitments, approvals, and dates.

Communications Principles

A credible communications approach should:

- Lead with the institutional purpose, not the building or transaction.
- State clearly whether the institution is exploring, negotiating, announcing, constructing, or operating a project.
- Distinguish commitments from aspirations and estimates from guaranteed outcomes.
- Address electricity, water, noise, lighting, construction disruption, emissions, cybersecurity, land use, and financial risk directly.
- Explain tangible student, faculty, workforce, research, and community benefits in enforceable or measurable terms.
- Make decision processes, public input opportunities, and accountability measures visible.
- Avoid characterizing a project as “sustainable,” “zero impact,” “community supported,” or “revenue generating” without documented evidence.

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Adaptation Notes. This communications plan should be scaled to the project. A small modular or research-focused facility may need a lighter communications footprint, while a hyperscale, colocation, or land-lease proposal should use the full plan, robust technical disclosures, recurring community engagement, construction communications, and ongoing public performance reporting. The institution should tailor all messages to its ownership model, legal authorities, campus context, local utility conditions, water availability, sustainability commitments, and the actual benefits it can document.

Do not release final materials until campus leadership, legal counsel, facilities, information technology, finance, sustainability, government relations, and the project partner have verified all project-specific facts, commitments, approvals, and dates.

The supplemental toolkits with this appendix include templates for:

- Presidential Campus Email — Exploration Phase
- Presidential Campus Email — Approval Announcement
- Press Release — Exploration / Due Diligence
- Press Release — Approval / Partnership Announcement
- Community Meeting Invitation
- One-Page Public Fact Sheet
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
- Media Q&A and Spokesperson Talking Points
- Social Media Copy (exploration, listening-session reminder, approval, construction notice)
- Construction / Operations Neighbor Notice
- Annual Accountability Report Outline
- Internal Manager Toolkit
- Community Advisory Council Charter

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Strategic Objectives

1. Build understanding of why your institution is considering the project and how it connects to the strategic plan.
2. Establish trust through early, recurring, and two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders.
3. Demonstrate that campus leaders are evaluating benefits and risks with equal rigor.
4. Protect institutional credibility by communicating only verified technical, environmental, financial, legal, and workforce commitments.
5. Create a durable public record of milestones, safeguards, commitments, performance measures, and opportunities for feedback.

Message Architecture

SAMPLE Core message

[Institution Name] is evaluating/advancing [Project Name] as a long-term infrastructure and academic opportunity. The institution will proceed only if the project supports its mission, protects the campus and surrounding community, aligns with its sustainability and financial responsibilities, and delivers documented benefits for students, faculty, staff, and the region.

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Message Topic	Adaptable Messaging
Mission alignment	The proposed project is being evaluated in relation to [strategic-plan goal], including opportunities for research, instruction, student success, workforce preparation, institutional technology, and regional partnerships.
Decision status	The project is currently in the [exploratory / due-diligence / negotiation / approval / construction / operational] phase. No final commitment will be made until [required approvals, studies, agreements, or conditions] are complete.
Academic Value	The institution is pursuing specific pathways for student learning, faculty research, internships, apprenticeships, credentials, curricular integration, and access to computing resources. These commitments will be documented through [agreement, workforce plan, academic partnership plan, or annual report].
Community Responsibility	We recognize that data centers can raise legitimate questions about power demand, water use, noise, lighting, backup generation, construction traffic, and land use. We will publish project-specific information and provide clear ways for people to ask questions and offer input.
Sustainability	Environmental performance will be evaluated with project-specific measures, including electricity demand, energy source, cooling design, water use, power-usage effectiveness, water-usage effectiveness where applicable, emissions, heat recovery, lighting, and construction impacts.
Financial Stewardship	The institution will evaluate capital costs, operating costs, utility and infrastructure costs, projected revenues or savings, risks, contract terms, equipment refresh obligations, decommissioning, and exit rights before entering a final agreement.

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Message Topic	Adaptable Messaging
Accountability	[Institution Name] will report progress against public commitments at [frequency] through [dashboard, community report, board report, or project website].

Message discipline

- Use language such as “under evaluation,” “subject to approvals,” “anticipated,” “projected,” and “the institution will publish” when facts are not final. Use definitive language only for signed commitments, adopted policies, completed studies, and approved budgets.

Stakeholder Message Plan

Target Audience	Interest	Primary Messaging	Effective Channels	Lead Communicator
Board of trustees/ regents	Mission, fiduciary duty, risk, approvals, reputation	The project requires a formal, evidence-based decision process with clear milestones, risks, and exit protections	Board briefings, committee materials, dashboards	President; chief financial officer; general counsel
Faculty	Research access, academic freedom, curriculum, environmental effects	Faculty input will shape research, teaching, governance, and sustainability expectations	Faculty senate, dean meetings, open forums, FAQ	Provost; chief information officer

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Target Audience	Interest	Primary Messaging	Effective Channels	Lead Communicator
Staff	Campus operations, jobs, safety, continuity, construction impacts	Staff will receive timely operational updates and clear points of contact	Email, intranet, supervisor toolkits, town halls	Chief operating officer; facilities lead
Students	Learning, jobs, affordability, climate, campus experience	The project must produce defined student opportunities and protect the campus environment	Student government, student email, social media, town halls	President; student affairs; academic leaders
Alumni and Donors	Institutional distinction, stewardship, workforce impact	The institution is exploring a mission-centered opportunity with appropriate safeguards	Alumni newsletter, presidential letter, webinars	President; advancement
Neighbors and community organizations	Noise, water, energy, traffic, health, visual impacts, transparency	Concerns are legitimate and will be addressed through evidence, mitigation, public information, and ongoing engagement	Community meetings, mailers, web hub, listening sessions	President; community relations; facilities

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

Target Audience	Interest	Primary Messaging	Effective Channels	Lead Communicator
Local/state officials and agencies	Economic development, infrastructure, permitting, tax structure, workforce	The institution seeks a transparent partnership that advances public benefit and respects applicable requirements	Briefings, formal notices, fact sheets	President; government relations
Utility and environmental partners	Capacity, interconnection, renewable supply, water, emissions, resilience	Infrastructure feasibility and environmental performance must be demonstrated before final commitment	Technical briefings, working groups, public summaries	Facilities; sustainability; project lead
Media	Newsworthiness, public impact, controversy, project specifics	Provide verified facts, acknowledge unresolved questions, and explain the decision process	News releases, media briefings, spokesperson interviews	Comms; President
Developer/operator/industry partner	Schedule, confidentiality, alignment, public commitments	The institution will not communicate claims that are unverified or inconsistent with the public-interest commitments	Communications protocol, approval process, joint statements	President; general counsel; Comms

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

ESTABLISH A COMMUNICATIONS GOVERNANCE GROUP

ALIGN | INFORM | ENGAGE | ADVANCE TOGETHER



A STRONGER CAMPUS
TODAY FOR A SMARTER,
MORE SUSTAINABLE
TOMORROW.

PEOPLE
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
OPPORTUNITY



PURPOSE

Coordinate, guide, and approve internal and external communications related to data center adoption, ensuring consistent messaging, stakeholder alignment, and proactive engagement across the college community.



LEADERSHIP

The group is chaired by the **Chief Communications Officer** and includes key representatives from across the institution.



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- ✓ Develop and approve communication strategies
- ✓ Ensure alignment across departments
- ✓ Anticipate and address risks and concerns
- ✓ Support transparent and timely information sharing
- ✓ Engage internal and external stakeholders
- ✓ Monitor progress and adapt as needed



**STRONG
COMMUNICATION TODAY.
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW.**



STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS



GREATER TRANSPARENCY



A MORE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS



EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES

APPENDICES

Communications Plan: Establishing a Campus Data Center

COMMUNICATIONS SPOKESPERSONS FOR DATA CENTER ADOPTION

RIGHT MESSAGE. RIGHT EXPERT. STRONGER IMPACT.



CLEAR
COORDINATED
TRUSTED
COMMUNICATION
BUILDS A STRONGER
CAMPUS TOMORROW.



PEOPLE
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
OPPORTUNITY

 Spokesperson	 Use for	 Avoid using for
 President	Mission, values, strategic rationale, accountability, community commitment	Unverified technical specifications or ongoing confidential negotiations
 Chief Financial Officer	Financial model, approval requirements, fiscal safeguards, risk allocation	Environmental performance claims outside verified analysis
 Chief Information Officer/ Research Computing Leader	Computing need, cyber posture, academic technology, capacity	Land-use or permitting commitments
 Facilities/Project Executive	Site, design, schedule, construction, utilities, mitigation	Broader institutional commitments not yet approved
 Sustainability Leader	Metrics, environmental due diligence, monitoring, mitigation, reporting	Claims beyond signed project requirements
 Workforce/Academic Leader	Credentials, curricula, research, internships, hiring pathways	Guaranteed job totals unless contractually documented
 Communications Lead	Process, updates, media coordination, stakeholder access	Policy or technical conclusions requiring subject-matter expertise



ALIGNED LEADERSHIP
STRONGER OUTCOMES



GREATER TRANSPARENCY
HIGHER TRUST



A MORE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS
BRIGHTER OPPORTUNITIES



TECHNOLOGY TODAY.
A STRONGER TOMORROW.

Establishing an Approval Protocol

A disciplined approval protocol is essential to ensure that all project communications are accurate, consistent, and aligned with institutional priorities. The following procedures establish clear review authority, documentation standards, and accountability mechanisms for public statements, supporting materials, and stakeholder responses. Together, they reduce the risk of unsubstantiated claims, conflicting information, and inappropriate delegation of institutional messaging authority.

- Route all project statements through [Communications Lead], [General Counsel], and the relevant technical owner.
- Maintain a single, dated fact sheet as the authoritative source for capacity, site, phase, approvals, costs, benefits, environmental metrics, and contacts.
- Require written substantiation for every numerical claim.
- Create a shared issue log recording questions, responses, evidence sources, owner, publication status, and follow-up date.
- Coordinate but do not delegate institutional messaging authority to a developer or operator.



APPENDICES

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN ACROSS THE DATA CENTER LIFECYCLE

INFORM | ENGAGE | BUILD TRUST | CREATE LASTING IMPACT

CLEARER
CONVERSATIONS
STRONGER
PARTNERSHIPS
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW.

PEOPLE
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
OPPORTUNITY

Phase	Communications purpose	Required actions	Primary assets
1  Internal readiness	Align leadership before public discussion	Confirm decision status, risks, approval sequence, confidentiality boundaries, spokespersons, and escalation procedures	Leadership briefing; internal Q&A; holding statement
2  Exploration and due diligence	Inform without pre-committing	Announce review process, publish evaluation criteria, invite early input, identify studies and milestones	Presidential email; project webpage; listening-session notice; FAQ
3  Proposed partnership or site	Explain the proposal and safeguards	Release project-specific facts, studies, terms that can be disclosed, community-benefit commitments, and feedback process	Proposal release; fact sheet; media Q&A; community meeting deck
4  Approval	Explain the decision and conditions	Communicate governing approval, conditions, commitments, accountability mechanisms, and next steps	Approval release; president statement; board summary; updated FAQ
5  Construction	Reduce disruption and sustain trust	Provide construction schedule, traffic notices, complaint channels, safety information, and monthly updates	Construction notices; neighbor mailer; construction dashboard; hotline script
6  Operations	Demonstrate performance and accountability	Report verified benefits and impacts, respond to incidents, and maintain community access	Annual impact report; performance dashboard; operations FAQ; issue-response templates

 STRONGER COMMUNITIES

 GREATER TRANSPARENCY

 A MORE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS

 EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

DATA TODAY.
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW.

Before public announcement

- Complete a confidential leadership briefing and spokesperson training.
- Establish the project webpage structure, FAQ, data room, monitoring plan, and inquiry channels.
- Identify affected campus units and neighboring blocks or organizations.
- Prepare holding statements for rumors, leaks, protests, utility questions, and permitting developments.
- Confirm which project details are public, provisional, confidential, or legally protected.

First 30 days after public notice

- Send a presidential email to campus on announcement day.
- Launch the public project webpage and public-question submission form.
- Conduct at least one campus forum and one community listening session.
- Issue a media release and distribute a fact sheet.
- Publish a “what we know/what is still being evaluated” update.
- Provide a written summary of questions received and themes heard within [10–15] business days.

APPENDICES

PEOPLE
IDEAS
COMMUNITY
A STRONGER
TOMORROW



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

For college data center adoption

Listen early. Communicate clearly. Build trust.

RESPONSIBLE
TECHNOLOGY
BRIGHTER
OPPORTUNITIES



CAMPUS
COMMUNITY
CLEANER
STRONGER
TOGETHER

1 ENGAGEMENT COMMITMENTS



- **Engage before decisions are final**, not only after an announcement.
- **Hold meetings at accessible times and locations**; offer virtual participation, language access, and ADA accommodations.
- **Publish agendas**, presentation materials, recordings, attendance summaries, questions, and responses.
- **Treat opposition and concerns** as substantive inputs, not public-relations obstacles.
- **Provide multiple channels**: online form, telephone line, email, mailed notice, campus office hours, and in-person listening sessions.
- **Do not ask community members to interpret technical** documentation alone; provide plain-language summaries alongside full reports.

2 LISTENING SESSION AGENDA



- 1 Welcome and purpose of the meeting.
- 2 What the institution is considering and what has not yet been decided.
- 3 Institutional mission, academic, and workforce rationale.
- 4 Site, design, ownership, and approval process.
- 5 Electricity, water, cooling, backup power, noise, lighting, traffic, and construction information.
- 6 Community-benefit, workforce, and accountability commitments.
- 7 Questions, concerns, and suggestions.
- 8 Next steps, response timeline, and contact information.

3 COMMUNITY-BENEFIT COMMITMENTS TO CONSIDER

Select only commitments the institution can fund, monitor, and enforce.



Paid internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning placements.



Curriculum support, equipment, faculty fellowships, or guest instruction.



Workforce hiring goals and vendor-diversity reporting.



Research-computing access or sponsored faculty/student research projects.



Local infrastructure improvements connected to traffic, sidewalks, landscaping, or resilience.



Noise, lighting, and landscaping performance standards that exceed minimum requirements.



Water-protection measures, non-potable or closed-loop cooling commitments where feasible, and public reporting.



Renewable-energy, demand-response, heat-recovery, or emissions-reduction commitments where feasible.



Community advisory council participation and annual public reporting.



Financial assurances for decommissioning, e-waste disposition, and site restoration.



INVESTING
IN PEOPLE
PLACES
POSSIBILITIES



4 ISSUES AND RISK COMMUNICATIONS

High-priority questions to answer early



- Why does the institution need or want this project?
- Is the institution building, owning, leasing, hosting, or partnering?
- What exactly has been decided, and what remains under review?
- How much electricity will the facility require, and who pays for related grid upgrades?
- What cooling technology will be used? How much water will be withdrawn and consumed? From what source?
- How will the project affect campus utility costs and the surrounding grid?
- What noise, light, air-quality, traffic, and construction impacts are expected, and how will they be monitored?
- What will students and faculty receive that is concrete, measurable, and durable?
- What is the financial model, including revenue, cost, liability, equipment replacement, decommissioning, and exit terms?
- What happens if the developer, financing, grid interconnection, technology, or market conditions change?



ACCESSIBILITY



TRANSPARENCY



ACCOUNTABILITY



COMMUNITY TRUST

STRONGER
COLLEGES
BRIGHTER
COMMUNITIES



APPENDICES

SAMPLE Holding statement for incomplete information

[Institution Name] is conducting due diligence regarding a potential data-center initiative. No final decision has been made. We recognize that projects of this kind require careful review of mission alignment, academic and workforce value, power and water needs, environmental impacts, financial responsibilities, community concerns, and long-term contractual obligations. As information is verified and decisions are made, we will share it through [project website] and scheduled engagement opportunities.

An Issue-Response Sequence for Community Engagement Communication Tasks

1. Acknowledge the concern promptly and respectfully.
2. State what is known, what is not yet known, and the source or process for obtaining answers.
3. Name the action the institution is taking, the accountable owner, and the next update date.
4. Correct inaccurate information without dismissing the underlying concern.
5. Document the issue and publish a response when the concern is broadly relevant.

COMMUNICATION CRISIS TRIGGERS

BE PREPARED. RESPOND. MAINTAIN TRUST.

IDENTIFY RISKS | RESPOND QUICKLY | PROTECT PEOPLE | STRENGTHEN CONFIDENCE

CLEAR COMMUNICATION
BUILDS A SAFER,
STRONGER CAMPUS
TODAY AND
TOMORROW.

PEOPLE
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
OPPORTUNITY

Communication Crisis Trigger	Likely Phase(s)	Example Scenarios	Recommended Response (Activate Rapid-Response Protocol)	RAPID-RESPONSE PROTOCOL SIX STEPS FOR A COORDINATED, TRANSPARENT RESPONSE
Utility interruption, water incident, generator/emissions event, fire, cybersecurity incident, injury, or environmental non-compliance.	Database Construction	- Power outage or grid disruption - Cooling system failure or water release - Emissions event, fire, or security breach - Injury on site - Environmental permit violation	Activate rapid-response protocol. Communicate protective actions, service changes, known facts, uncertainty, and next update time.	1 Verify Facts Confirm information with the incident commander and technical lead before public comment.
Material change in project scope, capacity, ownership, financing, schedule, or projected impacts.	Database Deliberation Project Development	- Change in facility size or capacity - New ownership or financing structure - Schedule delays or cost increases - Revised projected impacts	Activate rapid-response protocol. Clearly explain the change, what it means, and next steps.	2 Designate Spokespeople Assign one institutional spokesperson and one backup.
Major protest, misinformation surge, legal action, permit denial, or regulatory notice.	Database Deliberation Project Development	- Large-scale community protest - Viral misinformation on social media - Lawsuit, permit denial or regulatory action - Negative media coverage	Activate rapid-response protocol. Communicate early, provide verified information, and address concerns directly through multiple channels.	3 Communicate in the Right Order Communicate first to affected people when feasible, then to the broader campus and public.
Construction incident affecting campus access, neighborhood safety, or institutional operations.	Database Construction	- Construction accident or safety incident - Road closures or restricted campus access - Impacts to neighboring community - Disruption to campus operations	Activate rapid-response protocol. Inform affected people first, share safety information, and provide regular updates.	4 Be Clear and Complete Serve protective actions, service changes, known facts, uncertainty, and next update time.
OUR GOAL A proactive, transparent, and coordinated response to protect people, minimize disruption, and maintain trust throughout the project lifecycle.			PREPARE TODAY. RESPOND STRONGER TOMORROW.	5 Avoid Pitfalls Do not speculate, assign blame, share confidential information, or make premature statements about cause or liability.
				6 Provide Ongoing Updates Post time-stamped updates in one authoritative location.

PEOPLE FIRST

SAFER COMMUNITIES

GREATER TRANSPARENCY

HIGHER TRUST

A MORE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS

BRIGHTER OPPORTUNITIES

TECHNOLOGY TODAY.

A STRONGER TOMORROW.

APPENDICES

Measuring the Success of the Communications Plan Implementation

PEOPLE
IDEAS
COMMUNITY
A STRONGER
TOMORROW

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

For college data center adoption communications

CLEANER
CONVERSATIONS
BRIGHTER
OPPORTUNITIES

Track progress. Build trust. Improve communication.

PEOPLE
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
COMMUNITY

1 PROCESS MEASURES



Percentage of major milestones accompanied by a public update.



Number and diversity of engagement opportunities.



Attendance, participation, questions received, and accessibility accommodations provided.



Median response time for public and campus inquiries.



Percentage of FAQs or website materials updated within the established service standard.



Media accuracy rate and correction turnaround time.

2 OUTCOME MEASURES



Stakeholder understanding of project status, benefits, risks, and engagement channels.



Trust in the institution's transparency and responsiveness, measured through baseline and follow-up surveys.



Sentiment themes and unresolved concerns by stakeholder group.



Completion and public reporting of promised due-diligence studies and mitigation measures.



Delivery of academic, workforce, environmental, and community-benefit commitments.

3 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to assess progress and inform continuous improvement.



Do stakeholders understand what is proposed and how decisions will be made?



Do affected groups believe they have meaningful opportunities to influence the process?



Are project benefits and risks being communicated accurately and in plain language?



Are institutional commitments specific, measurable, publicly reported, and delivered?



Are communication activities reducing misinformation and increasing constructive participation?

INVESTING
IN PEOPLE
PLACES
POSSIBILITIES



TRANSPARENCY



ACCOUNTABILITY



ACCESSIBILITY



TRUST



CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT

APPENDICES

Geographic Area	State Resources
Federal	Powering America’s AI Future—Data Center Resource Hub Department of Energy
Federal	Data Centers and the Electricity Grid: Frequently Asked Questions Congress.gov Library of Congress
Alabama	Data Center Facts for Alabama Communities
Delaware	No state level resources
Florida	A Resource for Florida Communities Florida Economic Development Council
Arkansas	Data Center Services - Arkansas Department of Shared Administrative Services
District of Columbia	No state level resources
Georgia	Data Center – Energy Policy and Innovation Center (EPIcenter)
Kentucky	KRC releases Data Center Model Ordinance - Kentucky Resources Council – Environmental Defense for Kentucky

APPENDICES

Geographic Area	State Resources
Louisiana	Louisiana Data Centers: AI, Cloud & Hyperscale Sites - LED Louisiana Economic Development
Maryland	Data Centers
Mississippi	HOSTING (State Data Centers) Learn More Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services
Missouri	Data Centers Missouri Department of Natural Resources
North Carolina	NC Chamber Launches Data Center Resource Hub to Help North Carolina
Ohio	Quick Facts: Data Centers in Ohio Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
Oklahoma	No state level resources
Pennsylvania	Planning Toolkit - PA Department of Community & Economic Development
South Carolina	Data Centers and Artificial Intelligence South Carolina Association of Counties

APPENDICES

Geographic Area	State Resources
Tennessee	Tennessee Data Centers
Texas	Data Center Services Texas Department of Information Resources
U.S. Virgin Islands	No state level resources
Virginia	Cloud & AI Infrastructure VEDP
West Virginia	Data Centers - West Virginia Division of Economic Development Website



APPENDICES

1. Jha, R., Jha, R., & Islam, M. (2025). Forecasting US data center CO2 emissions using AI models: Emissions reduction strategies and policy recommendations. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, 5, 1507030.
2. Mondal, S., Faruk, F. B., Rajbongshi, D., Efaz, M. M. K., & Islam, M. M. (2023). GEECO: Green data centers for energy optimization and carbon footprint reduction. *Sustainability*, 15(21), 15249.
3. Mytton, D. (2021). Data centre water consumption. *npj Clean Water*, 4(1), 11.
4. Ristic, B., Madani, K., & Makuch, Z. (2015). The water footprint of data centers. *Sustainability*, 7(8), 11260–11284.
5. Shehabi, A., Smith, S., Sartor, D., Brown, R., Herrlin, M., Koomey, J., ... & Lintner, W. (2016). United States data center energy usage report.
6. Ravi, S. S., Löffler, T. S., Pina, E. A., Sharma, S., Lepour, D., Terrier, C., & Maréchal, F. (2026). From servers to services: Modeling data centers as heat-active urban energy prosumers. *Applied Energy*, 402, 127049.
7. Takci, M. T., Qadrdan, M., Summers, J., & Gustafsson, J. (2025). Data centres as a source of flexibility for power systems. *Energy Reports*, 13, 3661–3671.
8. Rubanovici, C. (2026). Building data centers: Legal, financing and project development considerations. *Financing and Project Development Considerations* (June 13, 2026).
9. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (2026). Data Center Planning Toolkit. <https://dced.pa.gov/download/pennsylvania-data-center-planning-toolkit/?wpdmdl=129714>
10. National League of Cities. (2026). Data Centers and Environmental Considerations. Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues, AAAS.
11. Chen, X., Wang, X., Colacelli, A., Lee, M., & Xie, L. (2025). Electricity demand and grid impacts of AI data centers: Challenges and prospects. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2509.07218*.
12. Lei, N., Lu, J., Shehabi, A., & Masanet, E. (2025). The water use of data center workloads: A review and assessment of key determinants. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 219, 108310.

Additional Research

- Ahammed, M. T., Osman, N., Das, C., Hossain, M. A., Hossain, S., & Kaium, M. H. (2022, February). Analysis of energy consumption for a hybrid green data center. In *2022 International Conference on Innovations in Science, Engineering and Technology (ICISSET)* (pp. 318–323). IEEE.
- Chidolue, O., Ohenhen, P. E., Umoh, A. A., Ngozichukwu, B., Fafure, A. V., & Ibekwe, K. I. (2024). Green data centers: Sustainable practices for energy-efficient IT infrastructure. *Eng. Sci. Technol. J*, 5(1), 99–114.
- de Roucy-Rochegonde, L., & Buffard, A. (2025). AI, data centers and energy demand. Paris, France: Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI).
- Melnatami, C. C. (2026). AI data centers and U.S. grids: A 2026–2030 regional forecast. *2026 IEEE Green Technologies Conference (GreenTech)*. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&number=11471641>



DATA CENTERS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

**Adaptable Communications
Assets Supplemental Toolkit**

2026



www.qem.org



<https://www.1890foundation.org/>

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Adaptation Notes. This communications plan should be scaled to the project. A small modular or research-focused facility may need a lighter communications footprint, while a hyperscale, colocation, or land-lease proposal should use the full plan, robust technical disclosures, recurring community engagement, construction communications, and ongoing public performance reporting. The institution should tailor all messages to its ownership model, legal authorities, campus context, local utility conditions, water availability, sustainability commitments, and the actual benefits it can document.

Before distributing any asset, confirm:

- The project phase and decision status are stated accurately.
- Every number has an owner, source, date, and approval.
- Academic and workforce claims identify concrete commitments, not general aspirations.
- Energy, water, environmental, financial, and risk statements have been reviewed by qualified owners.
- Required approvals, permits, public meetings, and regulatory processes are described correctly.
- Confidential, security-sensitive, proprietary, and personally identifiable information has been removed.
- Website links, inquiry channels, accessibility information, and event details work.
- The institution can answer the ten core questions on mission, ownership, power, costs, revenues, academic benefits, land, environmental/community impact, contractual risk, and strategic alignment.
- The institution has an approved response path for concerns about electricity, water, noise, lighting, air quality, traffic, construction, cost, and student/community benefit.
- The president and spokesperson team have reviewed the final materials and escalation protocol.

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 1: Presidential Campus Email—Exploration Phase

Subject: Beginning a careful review of a potential campus data-center initiative

Dear members of the [Institution Name] community,

[Institution Name] is beginning a structured review of a potential data-center initiative at or in partnership with our campus. This is an exploratory step; no final decision has been made.

We are examining whether this opportunity could advance our mission by strengthening [research computing / academic programs / student learning / workforce development / institutional technology / regional economic development].

At the same time, we understand that a data center is major infrastructure. Any proposal must be evaluated carefully for its electricity and water requirements, cooling technology, environmental effects, campus and community impacts, financial obligations, cybersecurity, and long-term operational responsibilities.

Our review will be guided by clear questions:

- What institutional need would the project address?
- What measurable benefits would it provide to students and faculty?
- Who would own, finance, operate, and maintain it?
- Can required power and infrastructure be provided responsibly?
- How would potential impacts to include noise, lighting, construction activity, traffic, air quality, and water use be avoided or mitigated?
- And how would the project advance our strategic plan over the next [10–20] years?

We are committed to transparency and meaningful engagement. Beginning today, project information, meeting dates, and a way to submit questions are available at [project website]. We will hold campus and community listening sessions on [dates/times], and we will publish updates as studies are completed and decisions are considered.

I invite students, faculty, staff, alumni, neighbors, and community partners to participate in this process. Your questions and perspectives will help ensure that any decision reflects our values, responsibilities, and long-term mission.

Sincerely,

[President Name]

[Title]

[Institution Name]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 2: Presidential Campus Email—Approval Announcement

Subject: [Institution Name] advances [Project Name] with academic, environmental, and community safeguards

Dear members of the [Institution Name] community,

Following [months/years] of evaluation, engagement, and required review, [governing body/authority] has approved [Institution Name]'s plan to [build / host / partner on / lease land for] [Project Name].

This decision reflects our conclusion that the project can advance [specific strategic priorities] while meeting defined standards for stewardship, transparency, and community responsibility. The project will [briefly describe ownership and operating model] and is expected to [describe only verified academic, workforce, research, institutional, or economic outcomes].

Approval is subject to the following commitments and conditions:

- [Verified electricity/interconnection commitment].
- [Verified water and cooling commitment].
- [Noise, lighting, air-quality, traffic, and construction mitigation commitment].
- [Academic, student, faculty, and workforce commitment].
- [Financial protection, decommissioning, and exit-right commitment].
- [Public reporting and community-engagement commitment].

We also recognize that approval is not the end of our responsibility. The institution will maintain a public project dashboard, provide construction and operations updates, and report annually on the commitments associated with this initiative. Materials, including [approved studies, agreements, meeting records, or summaries], are available at [project website].

Thank you to the students, faculty, staff, trustees, neighbors, public officials, and partners who participated in this process. We will continue to listen and communicate as the project moves into its next phase.

Sincerely,

[President Name]

[Title]

[Institution Name]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 3: Press Release—Exploration/Due Diligence

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Institution Name] begins evaluation of potential data-center initiative

[City, State] — [Date] — [Institution Name] today announced that it is beginning a formal evaluation of a potential data-center initiative that could be located [on campus / on institution-owned land / in partnership with location or organization]. No final agreement or construction decision has been made.

The evaluation will examine whether the initiative can advance the institution’s strategic priorities in [research, academic technology, student learning, workforce development, innovation, regional economic development, or other priorities] while meeting rigorous standards for financial stewardship, environmental performance, campus operations, and community engagement.

“A data center is not simply another building. It is a major, long-term infrastructure decision,” said [President Name], [title]. “We will evaluate this opportunity with a clear focus on our mission and an equally clear responsibility to our students, employees, neighbors, and the environment. We will not move forward unless the evidence demonstrates meaningful institutional value and responsible management of potential impacts.”

The institution’s review will address, among other issues, project ownership and financing; electricity demand and grid interconnection; cooling technology and water use; noise, lighting, backup generation, air quality, traffic, and construction impacts; cybersecurity and physical security; academic and workforce benefits; long-term operating costs; equipment replacement; decommissioning; and exit protections.

[Institution Name] will host [number] campus and community listening sessions beginning [date]. Project information, updates, and a form for submitting questions are available at [project website].

“Input from our campus and community will inform the review,” said [Community Engagement Lead], [title]. “We will communicate what is known, identify questions still under study, and publish updates as the process progresses.”

For more information, contact [media contact name, title, email, phone].

About [Institution Name]

[Boilerplate institutional description of 50–75 words.]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 4: Press Release—Approval/Partnership Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Institution Name] approves [Project Name], advancing research, workforce, and infrastructure goals with public accountability measures

[City, State] — [Date] — [Institution Name] announced today that [governing body] has approved [Project Name], a [brief facility/partnership description] to be located [location]. The project is expected to begin [phase or construction timing] and is subject to [remaining permits, agreements, or conditions].

The initiative will [describe the verified operating and ownership model]. It is designed to support [specific, verified strategic outcomes], including [research computing, instructional programs, workforce pathways, institutional services, heat recovery, grid flexibility, or regional partnerships].

“Today’s decision reflects a mission-centered assessment of both opportunity and responsibility,” said [President Name], [title]. “We have established clear conditions for academic value, environmental performance, financial protection, and community accountability. We will measure and publicly report our progress.”

Key commitments include:

- [Specific, verified energy/interconnection requirement or performance commitment].
- [Specific, verified cooling/water requirement or performance commitment].
- [Specific noise, lighting, air-quality, traffic, and construction mitigation].
- [Specific student, faculty, research, apprenticeship, internship, or credential commitment].
- [Specific community-benefit, local hiring, vendor-diversity, or public-reporting commitment].
- [Specific financial, decommissioning, or exit-right protection].

The institution will maintain public information at [project website], including project updates, engagement opportunities, applicable documents, construction notices, and an annual performance report.

[Partner Executive Name], [title] of [Partner Name], said, “[Partner quote that is fully aligned with institutional commitments and has been approved by both parties.]”

For more information, contact [media contact name, title, email, phone].

About [Institution Name]

[Boilerplate institutional description of 50–75 words.]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 5: Community Meeting Invitation

Headline: Community listening session: potential [Institution Name] data-center initiative

[Institution Name] invites students, employees, neighbors, alumni, and community partners to a public listening session regarding a potential data-center initiative.

Date: [Date]

Time: [Time]

Location/virtual access: [Location and link]

Accessibility/language support: [Instructions]

The meeting will provide an overview of the proposal and decision process, including the project's potential mission, academic, workforce, financial, energy, water, environmental, construction, and community considerations. Participants will have time to ask questions and share feedback.

No final decision has been made [if applicable]. Materials and a question-submission form are available at [project website].

For accommodations or assistance, contact [name/email/phone].

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 6: One-Page Public Fact Sheet

[Project Name]: What We Know Now

Project status: [Exploration / due diligence / proposed / approved / construction / operating]

What is proposed: [Plain-language description of facility/partnership and purpose.]

Why [Institution Name] is considering/advancing it:

- [Mission and strategic-plan connection]
- [Academic/research value]
- [Student/workforce value]
- [Institutional or regional value]

What has been decided: [List.]

What has not been decided or remains subject to approval: [List.]

Location and footprint: [Site, acreage/square feet, buffers, nearby uses.]

Ownership and operations: [Owner, operator, lease/partnership model, term, responsibility allocation.]

Electricity and infrastructure: [Planned MW, interconnection status, grid upgrades, cost responsibility, renewable/carbon-free attributes if verified.]

Cooling and water: [Cooling type, water source, annual/peak withdrawal and consumption where available, reuse/recycling or non-potable water strategy, monitoring.]

Community protections: [Noise, lighting, air quality, traffic, construction scheduling, landscaping, emergency response, complaint channel.]

Academic and workforce commitments: [Specific programs, paid opportunities, access, targets, reporting.]

Financial stewardship: [Publicly disclosable financial structure, risk protections, decommissioning, exit rights.]

How to participate: [Website, email, phone, upcoming meeting dates.]

Next milestone: [Date/event.]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 7: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a data center?

A data center is a physical facility that houses servers, storage, networking equipment, power systems, backup systems, and cooling equipment used to run digital services and manage data. The specific scale, design, energy demand, water use, and community impacts depend on the facility type and technology selected.

Why is [Institution Name] considering this?

[Institution Name] is evaluating the initiative because it may support [research computing, teaching, student services, cybersecurity, workforce development, economic development, revenue, or other mission priorities]. The institution is assessing whether these potential benefits are substantial, measurable, and consistent with its strategic plan.

Has the institution made a final decision?

[Insert accurate status.] The institution will communicate required approvals, decision points, and opportunities for input at [project website].

Will the project increase tuition or use unrestricted institutional funds?

[Insert verified, project-specific answer. If unknown: “The institution has not made a final financial determination. Any proposal will be evaluated for its effects on institutional finances, utility costs, debt, operating budgets, and student affordability before approval.”]

How much electricity will it use, and will it affect campus or community utility costs?

[Insert verified MW estimates, utility/interconnection information, grid-upgrade responsibilities, and rate-impact findings.] The institution will not represent utility impacts as settled until the utility and relevant regulators have completed applicable analyses.

How much water will it use?

[Insert cooling design, water source, withdrawal and consumption estimates, seasonal variation, reuse/non-potable/closed-loop strategy, and monitoring approach.] Water use is a central due-diligence issue and will be reported transparently.

Will it create noise, light, emissions, or traffic?

The project may create impacts during construction and operations. [Institution Name] will publish project-specific analyses and mitigation measures related to cooling equipment, backup-generator testing and emissions, exterior lighting, traffic, construction routes and schedules, landscaping, and compliance monitoring.

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

What will students and faculty receive?

[Insert specific commitments—e.g., research-computing allocations, internships, apprenticeships, courses, credentials, equipment, faculty research support, or scholarships.] The institution will report progress against these commitments at [frequency].

Who is responsible if the project changes, closes, or becomes obsolete?

[Insert verified contract allocation for financing, equipment refresh, e-waste, decommissioning, site restoration, and exit rights.]

The institution will not finalize an agreement without clear protection against avoidable long-term liabilities.

How can I ask questions or register a concern?

Submit questions through [website form], email [email], call [phone], or attend [meeting dates]. For construction or operations concerns, use [hotline/process].

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 8: Media Q&A and Spokesperson Talking Points

Opening statement

[Institution Name] is approaching this as a mission and stewardship decision, not simply a real-estate or technology transaction. We are evaluating/advancing the project because of its potential to support [specific benefits], while requiring evidence-based safeguards for energy, water, environmental impacts, financial exposure, and community well-being.

Why should a college or university host a data center?

A campus data-center initiative can potentially support research computing, teaching, cybersecurity, institutional services, workforce preparation, innovation partnerships, and regional development. However, those benefits should be specific to the institution and measured. Hosting a facility is not automatically a mission benefit.

Are you minimizing environmental concerns?

No. Electricity demand, water use, cooling technology, backup power, emissions, noise, lighting, and construction disruption are central issues in our evaluation. We will publish project-specific information, mitigation measures, and performance data rather than offering broad assurances.

Is this a commercial venture unrelated to the institution's mission?

[Tailor response.] Our standard is that any partnership must produce defined institutional benefits, not only lease or revenue potential. These include [specific academic, research, workforce, or infrastructure commitments], with public reporting on delivery.

How will you ensure the project does not burden nearby residents or campus users?

We are requiring evaluation and mitigation for [specific issues], will provide recurring opportunities for input, and will maintain clear channels for questions and complaints. The project's final requirements will include [specific enforceable protections].

Why not use cloud computing instead?

Cloud, colocation, shared, hybrid, modular, and institution-owned models all involve trade-offs in cost, control, resilience, research capacity, environmental performance, and operational responsibility. We are evaluating the model that best fits our needs and obligations rather than assuming ownership is the correct choice.

What would cause the institution to decline the project?

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

The institution will not proceed if due diligence shows that the project cannot meet requirements for mission alignment, utility feasibility, environmental protection, financial stewardship, contractual risk allocation, community impact mitigation, and measurable academic or workforce value.

What should spokespeople avoid saying?

- Do not say “no impact,” “green,” “clean,” “waterless,” “community supported,” “cost-free,” or “guaranteed jobs” unless those claims are technically documented and legally supportable.
- Do not disclose confidential negotiations, security-sensitive details, proprietary partner information, or personal data.
- Do not speculate about utility approvals, permits, financing, tax treatment, construction dates, or job counts.
- Do not dismiss concerns as misinformation; explain the facts and acknowledge unresolved questions.

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 9: Social Media Copy

Exploration announcement

[Institution Name] has begun a careful evaluation of a potential data-center initiative. No final decision has been made. We are assessing mission alignment, student and faculty benefits, electricity and water needs, environmental impacts, financial safeguards, and community input. Learn more and share questions: [short link].

Listening-session reminder

Join us on [date] for a public listening session on the potential [Project Name] initiative. We will discuss the decision process, academic and workforce goals, energy and water considerations, construction and community impacts, and next steps. Details: [short link].

Approval announcement

[Institution Name] has approved [Project Name] with commitments for [academic/workforce benefit], [environmental/mitigation measure], and public accountability. View the project details, documents, and reporting plan: [short link].

Construction notice

Construction activity related to [Project Name] is scheduled for [dates] and may affect [roads/parking/pedestrian routes/noise conditions]. We apologize for the disruption and will provide updates at [short link]. Questions or concerns: [contact].

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 10: Construction/Operations Neighbor Notice

Subject: Notice of upcoming [Project Name] activity

Dear neighbor,

[Institution Name] is writing to share information about upcoming [construction/maintenance/testing] associated with [Project Name].

What will occur: [Plain-language description.]

When: [Dates and hours.]

Expected effects: [Noise, traffic, lighting, access, parking, deliveries, generator testing, or other impacts.]

Mitigation measures: [Work-hour limits, traffic control, dust control, noise controls, access accommodations, monitoring, contact process.]

We recognize that these activities may be disruptive and appreciate your patience. For questions or to report a concern, contact [project hotline/email]. Urgent safety issues should be directed to [campus safety/emergency number].

Current updates are available at [project website].

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Institution Name]

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 11: Annual Accountability Report Outline

[Project Name] Annual Accountability Report: [Year]

President's message

Summarize the project's mission connection, major accomplishments, unresolved challenges, corrective actions, and next-year priorities.

Project status

State current phase, changes in scope, ownership/operations, approvals, schedule, and major decisions.

Academic and workforce outcomes

Report verified student participation, paid work-based learning, credentials, courses, faculty projects, research-computing use, partnerships, job placement, and outcomes against stated targets.

Environmental and infrastructure performance

Report electricity use, peak demand, power attributes as verified, PUE, WUE where applicable, water use by source, emissions/compliance information, heat recovery, renewable integration, generator testing, noise/light monitoring, and mitigation performance.

Community and campus experience

Report engagement activities, questions, complaints, response times, recurring themes, resolutions, construction impacts, traffic measures, and community-benefit delivery.

Financial stewardship

Report information that can legally be disclosed regarding revenue/cost performance, public expenditures, risk-management milestones, capital obligations, and decommissioning/security arrangements.

Looking ahead

Describe planned work, decision dates, studies, improvements, and upcoming engagement opportunities.

Adaptable Communications Assets Toolkit

Asset 12: Internal Manager Toolkit

Provide supervisors, deans, department chairs, and frontline staff with:

- A one-page project overview and current status.
- The approved FAQ and project website link.
- A referral protocol for media inquiries, technical questions, complaints, and emergency concerns.
- A short script: “The institution is sharing verified project information at [website]. I want to make sure your question reaches the right team, so I can connect you with [contact].”
- A list of upcoming forums, office hours, and construction-impact notices.
- Guidance not to speculate or share nonpublic negotiation details.

Asset 13: Community Advisory Council Charter

Purpose: Provide a continuing forum for dialogue, review of public information, and feedback on community impacts and commitments related to [Project Name].

Membership: [12–18] members representing nearby residents, students, faculty, staff, local government, workforce partners, environmental/community organizations, and business or civic leaders. Membership should reflect affected communities and include transparent selection criteria.

Scope: Review public project updates, monitoring results, construction/operations impacts, community concerns, accountability reports, and proposed mitigation changes. The council advises but does not replace legal permitting, governance, or public-comment processes.

Cadence: Meet [quarterly during planning and operations / monthly during peak construction]; publish agendas, attendance, nonconfidential materials, and summaries.

Response standard: The institution will provide written responses to formal recommendations within [30] days, stating whether it accepts, modifies, or declines each recommendation and why.

DATA CENTERS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Data Center Toolkit: Communications & Transparency Checklist

2026



www.qem.org



<https://www.1890foundation.org/>

Data Center Toolkit: Communications & Transparency Checklist

A working checklist covering communications cadence, construction and operations reporting, and the public project website. Bracketed values are default recommendations — adjust to institutional policy.

1. Due Diligence Through Approval

Cadence and disclosure obligations from initial exploration through the final approval decision.

- ☐ Publish a project update at least every **[30–60] days**, even if the principal update is that review remains underway.
- ☐ Release summaries of completed studies as legally permissible, including:
 - ☐ Power and interconnection
 - ☐ Water and cooling
 - ☐ Traffic
 - ☐ Noise
 - ☐ Air quality and generator emissions
 - ☐ Financial analysis
 - ☐ Academic and workforce analysis
- ☐ Brief the following audiences **before or concurrently with** each major public milestone:
 - ☐ Faculty
 - ☐ Staff
 - ☐ Students
 - ☐ Trustees
 - ☐ Elected officials
 - ☐ Community partners
- ☐ Update the public FAQ within **[five] business days** after any material project change.

2. Construction and Operations

Reporting obligations once the project moves into build-out and ongoing operation.

Construction phase

- ☐ Issue construction look-ahead notices at least **[two weeks]** before any of the following:
 - ☐ Traffic changes
 - ☐ Loud work
 - ☐ Utility interruptions
 - ☐ Lane closures
- ☐ Publish a **monthly construction dashboard**.
- ☐ Publish a **quarterly community update**.

Operations phase

- ☐ Issue an **annual operating report** covering:
 - ☐ Approved performance metrics
 - ☐ Realized benefits
 - ☐ Complaints received
 - ☐ Mitigations applied
 - ☐ Corrective actions taken

3. Project Website Blueprint

Public web hub hosted at [\[institution.edu/datacenter\]](#). Confirm each section is built, populated, and kept current.

Project overview

- ☐ What is proposed
- ☐ Why it is being considered
- ☐ Current phase
- ☐ Location
- ☐ Decision timeline

Decision process

- ☐ Required approvals
- ☐ Governing bodies
- ☐ Public meetings schedule
- ☐ Criteria for proceeding — or not proceeding

Documents

- ☐ Fact sheets
- ☐ Studies
- ☐ Agreements or public summaries
- ☐ Meeting materials
- ☐ Permits
- ☐ Reports
- ☐ Archived updates

Environmental and infrastructure

- ☐ Electricity supply
- ☐ Generation and source strategy
- ☐ Cooling approach
- ☐ Water source and estimated use
- ☐ Noise and light controls
- ☐ Backup generation
- ☐ Traffic
- ☐ Construction mitigation
- ☐ Monitoring plan

Academic and workforce benefits

- ☐ Research computing access
- ☐ Academic programs

- ☐ Paid student opportunities
- ☐ Faculty access
- ☐ Workforce partners
- ☐ Performance targets

Financial stewardship *(to the extent publicly disclosable)*

- ☐ Ownership model
- ☐ Cost responsibility
- ☐ Financial controls
- ☐ Community benefit commitments
- ☐ Decommissioning plan
- ☐ Exit protections

Community engagement

- ☐ Upcoming events
- ☐ Recordings of past events
- ☐ Questions received
- ☐ Response summaries
- ☐ Contact form
- ☐ Complaint process
- ☐ Accessibility accommodations

Dashboard

- ☐ Current project status
- ☐ Verified performance indicators