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# ***Data Centers and the United Association***

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A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE



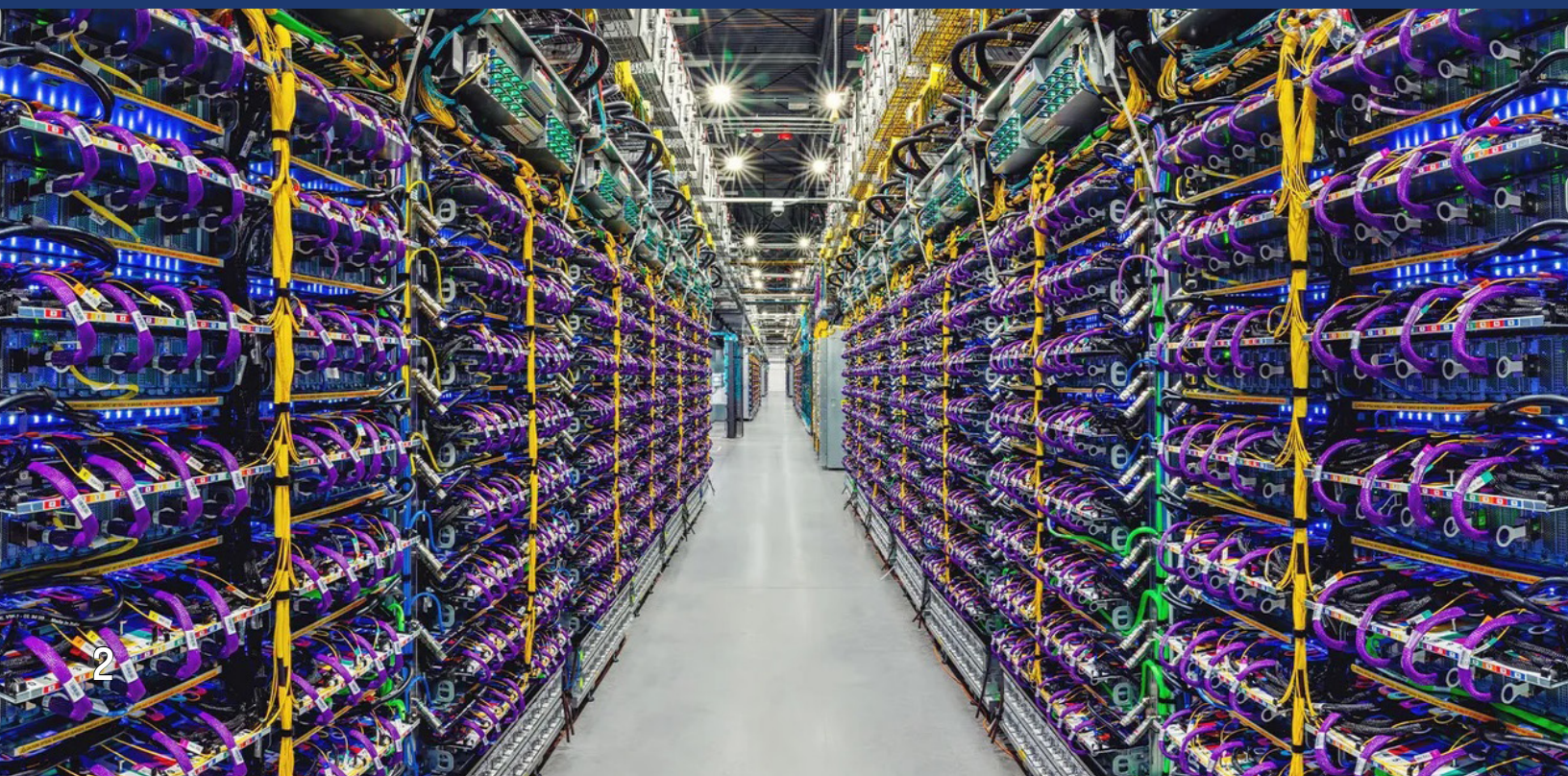
# INTRODUCTION

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*The UA Department of Legislative and Political Affairs worked closely with UA International Representative Chris Madello to put together a comprehensive guide on the UA's role in the future of data center construction – and to provide local unions with helpful talking points to push back on some of the common misconceptions surrounding the future of American technology and innovation.*

*For more than 135 years, the United Association has proudly built and maintained the future of American infrastructure. As technologies change, so, too, does the United Association. **The data center industry represents the future of our country, and in many ways, the future of the world as we know it. The United Association is at the forefront of the next wave of society's technological evolution. That's something to be proud of: playing a critical role in building the infrastructure that will support how the world works, connects, learns, and innovates.***

*In this guide you will find a basic overview of data centers, how each project leads to more opportunities for UA members, and how you can best advocate for your members with local elected officials, zoning boards, and end users. Plus, we provide a point-by-point set of talking points to help you push back on some of the fringe voices in opposition to new data center construction.*



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**Brought to you by  
the UA Department  
of Legislative and  
Political Affairs:**

Data center development is accelerating across North America, and it's creating real opportunities for UA members — but only if we are prepared to engage early and effectively. UA International Representative Chris Madelo and the UA Department of Legislative and Political Affairs developed this guide as a practical, all-in-one resource local unions can rely on when these projects reach their communities. Use it to answer questions, push back on misinformation, and make the strongest possible case for data center projects that mean good jobs, long-term work, and growth for our members.



*General President, United Association*

# THE BASICS

## ***What is a data center?***

A building that houses computer servers that power networks, databases, “the cloud”, and artificial intelligence platforms, to name a few.

## ***Why do we need data centers?***

Data centers are the essential infrastructure of the internet and everything we take for granted in our daily lives: cell phones, social media, Uber and Lyft, Netflix, smart TVs, online banking, ChatGPT, and modern-day life as we know it. Even our nation’s critical infrastructure, like our energy grids and national security systems, rely on data centers to keep running. Data centers quite literally make the internet – and everything online – possible.

## ***What role does the UA play building and maintaining data centers?***

Each data center requires thousands of miles of piping and cooling infrastructure, and that’s where the UA comes in. Our members are best equipped to do the precision welding, pipefitting, HVAC installation, then continue that work through HVAC service, maintenance, and building operations to ensure these mission-critical facilities run efficiently and stay online around the clock.

## ***What does the future of data centers look like?***

Ever since the personal computer was invented, technology has continued to evolve at a fast pace. Laptops and cell phones were once the hot new technology, but now artificial intelligence and the digital world is continuing to modernize. With that modernization comes an even bigger need for more data centers to house this information and make the future of technology possible.

## DATA CENTERS

### BY THE NUMBERS:

**93% UNION**

Union contractors performed the work on 93% of major data center projects that reported a contractor award.

**562 CAMPUSES**

Scheduled to be constructed for Data Centers as of August 2025.

**2,771 BUILDINGS**

Thousands of miles of pipe, advanced cooling systems, and skilled UA labor go into keeping these facilities online.

**189+ GIGAWATTS**

Of total power capacity associated with these projects.

**OVER \$1.9T**

In total project value for large-scale data center construction.

**280,000–850,000**

UA members potentially required on-site if these projects move forward simultaneously.

# EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND GROWTH - CONSTRUCTION PHASE



- While each project is different, on average, construction of a single data center campus **creates thousands of job opportunities for building trades craftspeople and for UA members.**
- Some jurisdictions, like Ohio, Texas, and Virginia, for example, will have close to 100 data centers **being built at one time – meaning our local unions are poised to grow to meet the manpower demands.**
- Data center construction **brings massive impact to the local economy and creates a robust tax base for the community,** meaning the benefits are shared by everyone.
- Opponents will dismiss these construction jobs as “only temporary” and not good enough, but the reality for many of our members is that these “only temporary” jobs are how we built this nation – **and it’s how we put food on the table and provide for our families.**
- When construction is booming and projects are ramping up, **it means our locals can expand and invest in growth. We can bring in more apprentices and open a new training center, we can improve our medical and retirement benefits, and we can ensure the health and strength of our union for future generations.**

# EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND GROWTH - OPERATION PHASE

- On average, one medium size data center **will require 15 to 80 permanent positions who work directly for the data center operator**, though this number varies with each project.
- However, the data center operators will also require continuing work, **like maintenance, logistics, HVAC service, repair, and more**. These opportunities often outnumber the direct, permanent opportunities.
- That means UA members are not only needed for the initial construction phase of the data center campus, but we are often contracted for maintenance and **ongoing work throughout the lifetime of the data center**.
- The services that are performed by these companies **not only drive employment while performing their onsite duties, but they also drive employment growth for their internal operations and expansion of the offsite facilities** of these companies as well.

## Growing Our Membership

### A CASE STUDY ON UA LOCAL 602

Over a 4 year period the data center industry has helped Local 602's total apprenticeship enrollment increase by over 450 apprentices, exceeding 1,360 apprentices in 2025 and their total membership increase by over 1,600, exceeding 6,500 members

That type of growth is incredible for a number of different reasons, but none more important that the number of lives it allows us to touch by introducing and including so many more workers and their families into the way of life that we all enjoy. This growth, in membership and man hours, have helped Local 602 make some incredible benefit improvements to our medical, pension and other fringe benefits.



# EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND GROWTH - RETROFITS AND RENOVATIONS



- On average, the typical data center will look to retrofit the mechanical, electrical, and technological systems **once every 10 to 15 years** depending on the desired operating system and advancement of technology.
- While the retrofitting of these systems does not create the number of jobs that the overall construction of a building and/or campus does, **they can be quite extensive for the more skilled and higher paying trades.**
- There is a consistent theme from those who advocate against data centers that once the technology of the systems in data centers is obsolete, the data center operator will leave the building vacant; **that is simply not true.**
- The very first data centers were built in the late 1990's and have already been retrofitted to include newer and more efficient systems – **meaning continuous work for UA members.**

## ADVOCACY AND THE CASE FOR CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN DATA CENTERS

- In general, most elected officials on the state, county and local levels support data center development. They understand how the **development and tax revenue will help their budgets and the communities that they represent.**
- The opposition is typically **driven by small groups of vocal residents** who do not represent the vast majority.
- It is essential that the **UA has a strong presence during any public hearings or comment periods to ensure our voice is heard** – and that elected officials have the confidence to move forward.

# THE STRATEGY – WORKING WITH END USERS

Typically, when the data center end users are looking at a new data center development, they will hire a firm or send their own PR team to work to get the project approved. In some instances, depending on the area, they will engage with the Local Unions in that area. In those instances, they will notify the Local Unions of where their support is best utilized.

In the other instances, from a strategy standpoint to support proposed data center development, ***there are several items that Local Unions can focus their time and attention on:***

- Form a committee amongst the local building trades unions to advocate for data center development.
- Communitywide petitions to support data center development that begins with the local union members and their families.
- Social Media ads focusing on advocacy and education.
- Partnering with local community groups.
- Community education to increase their comfort level and garner their support for data center development.
- Engaging and educating elected official to garner their support for data center development.
- Support and introduce legislation and zoning initiatives that help and approve data center development.
- Participating in public hearings that are information and voting/action inclusive to support data center development.
- Tracking development notifications.
- Tracking zoning hearings and approvals.
- Reaching out to data center developers to partner with them.

# THE STRATEGY – ATTRACTING NEW END USERS

In areas where data center development is not currently proposed, local unions can engage with elected officials to conduct community education campaigns and zoning initiatives to attract data centers.

**Some recent examples include several counties, in which no data centers have ever been built, where county officials have dispatched someone from their economic development team to conduct a public education campaign.**

- For close to a year now, these campaign have been working to generate public and political support.
- In November, that early coordination paid off when county officials held the first zoning hearing to clear the path for future data center development. **Thanks to advance outreach and collaboration with local unions, supporters filled the room,** demonstrating strong community and labor backing for moving forward.
- This type of partnership shows how the UA can work alongside elected officials and the community to build grassroots support, strengthen political momentum, and **generate more work opportunities for UA members.**



# THE CONTINUED CASE FOR DATA CENTERS

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- Data centers are not going away, no matter how loud the voices in opposition get. Our society relies on the internet – and data centers make it all possible.
- If the United States does not stay ahead of the curve, and if the UA does not lead the path forward, we are going to get left behind. Worse, we are going to leave jobs on the table.
- Our energy grid, our national security, and our communications, among so much else, rely on secure data centers. Can you imagine what would happen if those data centers were built in China instead of the United States?
- The local impacts are also important. With each data center project comes a boost to the local tax base, an increase to the local economy, and more opportunities for people to secure a better future. If these projects are not built in your community, someone else will get that opportunity instead of you.
- Concerns about energy costs are often raised—but data center developers are increasingly required to pay for transmission upgrades, substations, and grid improvements, and in some cases even build their own power generation projects. Many are also being charged higher utility rates to account for their usage.
- The best way to protect reliability, control costs, and ensure smart infrastructure investment is to build these projects correctly from the start, using the best-trained and most highly skilled workforce in the industry: the men and women of the United Association.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

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### CONSTRUCTION

- Skilled trades jobs
  - Local suppliers
  - Economic activity
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### OPERATIONS

- 15-20+ permanent jobs
  - Above-average wages
  - IT, engineering, security
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### TAX REVENUE

- Millions annually
- Funds schools, services
- Minimal infrastructure burden

# DATA CENTER FACTS

## UNDERSTANDING THE REALITY BEHIND COMMON CONCERNS:

Many common concerns are based on experiences with data centers built 15–20 years ago. Newer data centers are fundamentally different—designed with advanced efficiency standards for electric and water use, modern cooling technologies, and stricter environmental controls that significantly reduce impacts compared to older facilities. As technology continues to evolve, these improvements not only lower environmental impact but also increase reliability and long-term sustainability for the communities where they are built.

### CONCERN

### REALITY

#### NOISE:

Will disturb the peace and quiet

55-60 dB at property edge (normal conversation level)—**quieter than a lawn mower.** Generators only test 15-30 minutes each month.

#### AIR QUALITY:

Diesel fumes will create pollution

SCR technology **eliminates 99% of emissions.** Generators run rarely. **Cleaner than school buses.** UA members at work mean highest quality and safety standards on the job.

#### PROPERTY VALUES:

Will lower nearby home values

Tax revenue **funds better schools and services, maintaining and boosting values.** Studies show neutral to positive impact.

#### POWER BILLS:

My costs will rise because of data centers

Bills rise from fuel costs, inflation, and grid upgrades—not just data centers. **Data centers pay high rates offsetting costs.**

#### SPRAWL:

Approve one and they'll be everywhere

Few unicorn sites have the required power, fiber, zoning, and topography. **Each project undergoes rigorous independent review.** One approval does not equal blanket approval.

# DATA CENTERS IN OUR COMMUNITIES: THE BENEFITS



**BENEFIT TO LOCAL ECONOMY WITH INFLUX OF NEW JOBS**



**SUSTAINABLE JOBS FOR THE FUTURE IN SEVERAL INDUSTRIES**



**BOOST TO LOCAL TAX BASE, RESULTING IN INCREASED FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES**



**TRAINING PIPELINES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS**



**ATTRACT CONTINUED LONG-TERM INVESTMENT FROM EMPLOYERS**



**MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKING FAMILIES TO GET AHEAD**

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Data centers deliver substantial economic benefits—high-paying jobs, millions in tax revenue, and minimal community impact. Modern facilities are quiet, clean, and secure, strengthening local economies while supporting schools and essential services. This is an incredible opportunity for the UA. We are on the forefront of what is the next industrial revolution, and with the work that we do, with our membership, our contractor partners and our leadership, no one is in a better position than us to make sure this industry, the future of our world is successful for many generations to come.

