

NO BUILDOUT FOR BILLIONAIRES

HOW TO BEAT BACK THE DATA CENTER EXPANSION

The world's largest tech corporations — Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Meta, and others — are [racing](#) to embed artificial intelligence (AI) into every aspect of how we live and work, driven not by social benefit but by profit. To cement this control, they are spending billions to build “hyperscale” data centers with thousands of servers, often sprawling over a million square feet.

This buildout is not inevitable. It reflects a specific corporate strategy: bullying localities into accepting scale at all costs and manipulating democratic processes to prioritize speed over accountability. And the costs of this strategy are devastating. Data centers devour resources that our communities rely on to survive: straining water and energy supply, spiking residents' utility bills, generating suffocating pollution, and draining public budgets through massive tax breaks. Promised economic benefits rarely materialize. Instead, localities are left to manage the consequences while corporations pocket the profits.

HOW TO USE YOUR LOCAL POWER

Local governments are the frontline decision-makers when it comes to data center development. While the federal administration continues to deregulate Big Tech and extractive industries, local electeds have real, immediate authority to work with residents to stop or restrict harmful development. They can also simultaneously push state legislators and utility regulators for change on those levels.

Local and state governments each hold distinct tools. Local authority typically includes zoning and land use approvals, water use, some energy regulations, noise mitigation, some transparency requirements, and local tax breaks and abatements. State and regional authority tends to cover energy regulations and public utility commission oversight, ratepayer protections, tax breaks and policy more broadly, and transparency (more [here](#)). In many cases, both local and state electeds can ban, pause, or restrict data center development. Understanding where your authority is strongest —and where state law may limit local action — is critical. Local electeds can seek legal support early to clarify what's possible in your jurisdiction.

There are many available interventions, outlined in the section that follows. Here's a map for how to think about using them:

These strategies are clearest before a data center has been approved. However, local electeds and communities are also finding ways to restrict and stop previously-approved facilities. Reach out to LP for support on what's possible in your jurisdiction.

Start by pushing for a ban

If your jurisdiction has the legal authority to, and the political conditions support it, pursue an outright prohibition on data center development. Depending on the jurisdiction, bans can be complete, specific to data centers over a certain amount of resource use or size, or specific to certain geographic areas or zoning categories. Bans are the clearest, most protective action available. Skip the moratorium if you can go straight here – a moratorium is a means to buy time, not a necessary first step.

If you need time, pass a moratorium.

If you're not sure you can achieve an outright ban or other strong protections, pursue a moratorium and use the time to develop your strategy. A moratorium halts all data center approvals – we recommend at least one year – giving your community time to update local laws and build organizing power against harmful development. Use that time to find out the extent of your local land-use authority and whether state law limits your options. Consult with colleagues and community partners to assess the most urgent threats – water scarcity, grid strain, pollution, affordability, community health – that your data center policy interventions and narratives will prioritize. Look into local ordinances that you can build on or need to update, and opportunities to collectively advocate for state-level policy changes.

If a ban isn't possible, define and restrict data centers tightly.

Where preemption or political conditions prevent an outright ban, use every tool you have to discourage extractive development. These tools can include defining and then restricting certain types of data centers in zoning, stringent permitting, aggressive environmental and noise standards, water use regulations, and transparency requirements. Identify legal support to understand your authority, any preemption limits, and where you have room to act. (Reach out to Local Progress for support).

Connect with fellow electeds in neighboring jurisdictions.

Data center impacts cross jurisdictional boundaries. A facility approved next door can strain your water supply, overload your grid, and route heavy truck traffic through your streets. Building a regional approach can protect your residents from spillover effects of nearby data centers, and help build the collective political momentum needed to push your state legislature to take action, including [statewide moratoria that several states are now already considering](#).

Other resources:

- [North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit - AI Now](#)
- [The People Say No: Resisting Data Centers in the South](#)
- [Data Center Site Fight Guide: A Shared Resource for Stopping Data Centers](#)