

# COMMUNITY CHECKLIST OF COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

## Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) as a Tool for Transparency and Accountability

Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are written agreements that help make sure large projects, like data centers, give back to the communities where they are built. They exist as an attempt to ensure that private investments generate tangible public benefits and that residents are not left carrying the costs, such as increased energy demand, pressure on water resources, land-use impacts, or environmental stress.

Because many data centers are approved quickly, create relatively few permanent jobs, and place long-term demands on local infrastructure and natural resources, communities often have limited opportunities to influence decisions once approvals are granted. CBAs help address this gap by setting clear expectations early in the process.

When discussing a potential CBA, communities may want to ask whether it can include (checklist):

CHECKLIST OF COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS	
	<b>7.1 Water Conservation and Efficiency Standards</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Install high-efficiency cooling systems (closed-loop or non-evaporative where feasible) consistent with best practices identified by EPA Energy Star <sup>1</sup>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Use reclaimed, recycled, or non-potable water instead of drinking water as recommended by EPA WaterSense <sup>2</sup> and EPA water reuse guidance <sup>3</sup>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Implement water-use intensity (WUI) <sup>4</sup> targets with annual reduction goals, aligned with emerging industry metrics used by ASHRAE and Department of Energy
	<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct regular water audits and implement leak detection and repair programs
	<b>7.2 Limits on Water Withdrawals or Consumptive Use</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Set maximum daily and annual withdrawal caps tied to watershed capacity
	<input type="checkbox"/> Prohibit increased withdrawals during drought, low-flow, or heat-stress conditions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Require no-net-increase in consumptive use for expansions or new phases
	<input type="checkbox"/> Offset unavoidable water use through verified watershed recharge projects in the headwaters of the basin

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). *U.S. EPA's ENERGY STAR program develops energy-saving guidance for co-location data centers.*

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). *U.S. EPA's ENERGY STAR program develops energy-saving guidance for co-location data centers.*

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2004). *Guidelines for water reuse* (EPA/625/R-04/108).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency & ENERGY STAR. (n.d.). *What is water use intensity (WUI)?* ENERGY STAR.

	<b>7.3 Energy Efficiency or Renewable Energy Commitments</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Commit to 100% renewable electricity by a defined date
	<input type="checkbox"/> Install on-site solar, storage, or microgrids where feasible
	<input type="checkbox"/> Meet or exceed energy-use intensity (EUI) performance standards
	<input type="checkbox"/> Participate in utility demand-response programs to reduce peak loads
	<b>7.4 Green Building Standards (LEED or equivalent)</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Achieve LEED Gold or higher, Envision, or an equivalent performance standard
	<input type="checkbox"/> Use low-impact, low carbon construction materials
	<input type="checkbox"/> Design buildings to minimize heat island effects through green roofs and shading
	<input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate water-efficiency landscaping
	<b>7.5 Public Reporting on Water and Energy Use</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Publish monthly and annual water and energy data in a publicly accessible format
	<input type="checkbox"/> Report water sources, withdrawals, return flows, and consumptive use separately
	<input type="checkbox"/> Disclose energy sources, backup generator testing, and associated emissions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Allow independent third-party verification of reported data
	<b>7.6 Ongoing Environmental Monitoring</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Install real-time water-use and groundwater monitoring systems
	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor surface water flows, ground water levels, and water quality indicators
	<input type="checkbox"/> Track air emissions from on-site generators and power supply
	<b>7.7 Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Water, Climate, and Community Resilience</b>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Restore or protect wetlands, floodplains, and riparian buffers on-site or within the watershed
	<input type="checkbox"/> Use green infrastructure (rain gardens, permeable pavement, recharge systems) to manage stormwater
	<input type="checkbox"/> Implement groundwater recharge projects using infiltration basins or restored natural areas
	<input type="checkbox"/> Preserve or expand natural open space to reduce flooding and improve water quality
	<input type="checkbox"/> Support off-site NbS investments in the same watershed when on-site options are limited
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tie NbS performance to measurable outcomes (gallons infiltrated, acres restored, pollutants reduced)