# A COMMUNITY CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING DATA CENTER IMPACTS

Data center projects are often well underway before the public becomes aware of them, leaving communities with limited opportunities to influence key decisions. Asking informed questions early in the process can help protect **local water resources, public health, and overall community well-being**. This checklist brings together lessons and best practices from **multiple checklists, toolkits, and guidance documents developed by organizations**[1,2,3,4] **across the Great Lakes states**. It is designed to help communities evaluate proposed data centers through a **comprehensive lens that considers environmental impacts, economic implications, public health, community benefits, and other local concerns**, supporting more transparent, accountable, and balanced decision-making that aligns with the long-term protection of the Great Lakes and the people who depend on them.

Use this checklist to engage early with local officials, planning boards, and developers.

| COMMUNITY CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING DATA CENTER IMPACTS | |
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| **6.1** | **Water Resources & Supply** |
| ☐ | What amount of water will the data center need each day and each year? |
| ☐ | What water quality is required (drinking-quality, industrial, non-potable)? |
| ☐ | What is the source of the water (surface water, groundwater, municipal supply)? |
| ☐ | Is that water source already stressed or at risk of depletion? |
| ☐ | Have seasonal or drought conditions been considered in water planning? |
| ☐ | Have regional water studies or projections been reviewed? |
| ☐ | Who pays for new pipes or wastewater treatment if upgrades are needed? |
| ☐ | Does the site have enough water for both residents and the data center, even in drought years? |
| **6.2** | **Water Impacts & Protection** |
| ☐ | Will the project affect local rivers, lakes, wetlands, or aquifers? |
| ☐ | Could private wells or small community water systems be impacted? |
| ☐ | How will wastewater or discharge be handled and monitored? |
| ☐ | Could water withdrawals or discharges affect downstream users or ecosystems? |
| **6.3** | **Water Efficiency & Reuse** |
| ☐ | Are there plans for closed-loop cooling systems to reduce water use? |
| ☐ | Will stormwater, recycled water, or treated wastewater be used instead of fresh water? |
| ☐ | Are there opportunities to reuse water on-site or with nearby facilities? |
| ☐ | Can discharged water be safely reused by other businesses or community uses? |

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[1] Freshwater Society. (2025). *Data centers and water use* (June 2025). https://freshwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Data-Centers-and-Water-Use_Freshwater.pdf
[2] Coalition for Responsible Data Center Development. (n.d.). *Coalition for Responsible Data Center Development* (Website).
[3] MediaJustice. (2025). *The people say no: Resisting data centers in the South.* MediaJustice.
[4] Hoosier Environmental Council. (2025). *A community guide to data centers.* Indianapolis.

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| | **6.4** | **Energy Use & Air Impacts** |
| | ☐ | How much electricity will the data center require? |
| | ☐ | Where will that energy come from (renewable vs. fossil fuels)? |
| | ☐ | Will diesel backup generators be used, and how often will they operate? |
| | ☐ | How will they avoid using noisy, polluted diesel generators for backup power? |
| | ☐ | How will air pollution from energy use and generators be minimized? |
| | ☐ | Who pays for the new power plants or grid upgrades needed? |
| | ☐ | Will data centers use renewable energy or batteries to ease strain during peak hours? |
| | **6.5** | **Noise & Community Impacts** |
| | ☐ | What noise levels are expected from generators, cooling systems, and HVAC equipment? |
| | ☐ | What noise mitigation measures will be used (sound barriers, setbacks, operating limits)? |
| | ☐ | How will impacts on nearby neighborhoods, schools, and wildlife be addressed? |
| | **6.6** | **Land Use & Community Planning** |
| | ☐ | Is the data center located in an appropriate zoning area? |
| | ☐ | Are there opportunities to co-locate with complementary industries or land uses? |
| | ☐ | Does the project limit future options for housing, agriculture, or other economic development? |
| | **6.7** | **Long-Term Accountability** |
| | ☐ | How will water use, water quality, and emissions be monitored and reported? |
| | ☐ | Are there enforceable conditions or permits tied to water and environmental protection? |
| | ☐ | What happens if the data center expands or increases water and energy use in the future? |
| | **6.8** | **Community Transparency** |
| | ☐ | Has the public been given meaningful opportunities to comment? |
| | ☐ | Are all water, energy, and environmental data publicly available? |
| | ☐ | Who is responsible if unexpected impacts occur? |
| | **6.9** | **Nature-Based Solutions & Green Infrastructure** |
| | ☐ | Will the project include green infrastructure (like rain gardens, bioswales, or wetlands) to soak up rainwater and reduce runoff? |
| | ☐ | How will the project protect or use existing natural areas (trees, wetlands, open space) to manage stormwater instead of paving over them? |
| | ☐ | Will trees be planted in parking lots and along paved areas to provide shade and reduce extreme heat? |