

THE AI INSTITUTE / OPERATING INTELLIGENCE

INFLUENCE AND PARTNERSHIP RADAR · 21 AUG / 2026



# An AI Data Centre Is a Community Deal

The project may be financed by companies, but power, water, skills, trust and opportunity are negotiated locally.

Boards, C-suite and senior management

Research period: July 2025 – August 2026

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PUBLICATION RECORD

# An Institute thesis and decision framework

Make a public local-value compact—with named constituencies, cost allocation and outcome reporting—a condition of every major AI infrastructure partnership.

WHAT LEADERS SHOULD TAKE FROM THIS PAPER

- 01
- Treat local institutions as delivery partners before site and capital decisions are fixed—not as audiences for a finished announcement.
- 02
- Separate construction work from permanent roles, committed funds from realised outcomes and supplier estimates from independently reported results.
- 03
- Agree who pays for energy, water, transmission and public infrastructure before approving the economic case.
- 04
- Give workforce, education, community and First Nations representatives standing in the deal, alongside the developer and public authorities.
- 05
- Publish a six-field local-value compact and review it annually through an independent measurement owner.

## Research method

This influence and partnership radar compares official government policy, international energy analysis and attributed supplier announcements available by 21 August 2026. It separates announced inputs from realised outcomes and translates the recurring partnership pattern into a board-level local-value compact. The newest arXiv AI batch was reviewed separately as an R&D radar and did not displace the stronger leadership and partnership signal.

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How to use this brief

Start with the decision and use the framework to challenge the current plan. Figures retain their original populations and definitions. Institute analysis is labelled, and limitations are recorded before the references.

# Approve the local bargain with the infrastructure

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A major AI data centre is presented as a technology or property investment. In practice, it is also an agreement with a power system, a water system, a workforce, public authorities and the people who live near it. Those relationships can shape cost, timing and permission to operate long after the opening announcement.

OpenAI's 17 August announcement for PORTS-Pike in Ohio makes the widening transaction visible. The supplier describes an 8GW-IT ambition, construction and operating jobs, community funds, education credits, annual reporting and a planned Ohio Community Compact. It also says later expansion depends on new power—including gas—transmission, permits and financing. Those are not peripheral details. They are the project.<sup>1</sup>

The board-level decision is therefore bigger than where to put compute. Make the local-value compact part of the investment case. Approve capacity, infrastructure cost allocation, workforce pathways, community governance and public outcomes together.

**If the community bargain is negotiated after the site decision, the organisation has confused communications with partnership.**

# Public value has moved inside the transaction

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Australia's official expectations for data-centre and AI-infrastructure developers are unusually direct. They describe meeting the expectations as a foundation for social licence and ask major developments to address energy-price pressure, grid investment, new clean energy, water efficiency and reporting, First Nations engagement, workforce and union partnerships, and access to compute for local researchers, startups and not-for-profits. The expectations are government policy, not standalone law, but they offer a practical negotiation checklist.<sup>2</sup>

The United Kingdom's Lanarkshire AI Growth Zone uses another model: government-backed industrial policy, private investment, a community fund, apprenticeships and conditional delivery milestones. The announcement separates future permanent AI and data-centre roles from the larger construction workforce and states that the jobs and investment figures were supplied by the developer. That distinction is essential when leaders assess the local return.<sup>38</sup>

Across these cases, local value is no longer a charitable add-on. It is part of the delivery architecture. Skills determine who can operate the facility. Grid and water arrangements determine timing and cost. Community confidence affects planning and political durability. Local compute access determines whether the region hosts infrastructure or builds capability around it.

# Put six commitments in public before final approval

The compact should name six things. First, infrastructure: new supply, connection timing, transmission, water use and who carries each cost. Second, work: construction jobs, permanent roles, apprenticeships, completion rates and pathways into local employment. Third, local capability: procurement, research access, startup compute and education partnerships.

Fourth, community governance: which local, civil-society and First Nations constituencies have standing, how concerns are resolved and what information remains public. Fifth, outcomes: the small set of measures reported annually by an owner independent enough to challenge the sponsor. Sixth, reset rights: the thresholds for renegotiation when demand, water, grid costs, ownership or project timing changes.

Each commitment needs a baseline, a deadline and an accountable party. A fund announced is not benefit delivered. A training place is not a durable job. A power purchase agreement is not proof that household or system costs are protected. The compact turns attractive claims into decisions that can be governed.

EXHIBIT / THE SIX-FIELD LOCAL-VALUE COMPACT

|                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>01</div> <div>Infrastructure</div> <div>Energy, water, transmission, timing and cost allocation.</div> <div>Public bargain</div> | <div>02–03</div> <div>Work + capability</div> <div>Permanent roles, pathways, local procurement and compute access.</div> <div>Durable value</div> | <div>04–06</div> <div>Voice + accountability</div> <div>Community standing, independent measures and reset triggers.</div> <div>Permission to operate</div> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

# Measure the system effect, not only the facility

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The International Energy Agency estimates that data-centre electricity demand could approach 950 terawatt-hours by 2030, with AI-focused demand rising especially quickly. Its analysis also stresses geographic concentration, infrastructure lead times and growing concern about social acceptability. A global percentage can look manageable while a local cluster creates a significant connection, generation or affordability problem.

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That is why one market cannot stand in for another. In the United States, the bargain may revolve around utilities, tax arrangements, local employment and new generation. In the United Kingdom and Europe, planning, heat reuse, industrial policy and sovereign capacity can feature more strongly. Australia adds explicit expectations on water, First Nations engagement and avoiding upward energy-price pressure.

In parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, grid capacity, water availability, land, local-language institutions and access to domestic compute can change the order of priorities. Leaders should use the same compact fields everywhere but negotiate the thresholds locally.

# Build a coalition that can deliver—and challenge—the deal

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A workable partnership needs more than the developer and the approving authority. The utility or system operator must make connection timing and cost visible. Workforce and education institutions must connect training to actual roles. Community and First Nations representatives need standing before the proposal hardens. An independent measurement owner must publish progress without allowing the sponsor to grade itself.

Developer initiatives show what may be possible. OpenAI's Stargate Community programme describes site-specific plans, infrastructure and water commitments, workforce engagement and community investment. Stargate Norway couples planned capacity with renewable power, closed-loop cooling, excess-heat possibilities and priority access for the local ecosystem. These are supplier announcements, not independent outcome studies, so they are useful design inputs rather than proof.<sup>67</sup>

The strategic advantage is not simply fewer objections. A stronger coalition can surface grid, water, workforce and legitimacy risks early enough to change the design. It can also make local benefit more credible to employees, customers, investors and governments.



# Draft the compact before the next investment gate

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Choose the organisation's largest planned AI-infrastructure commitment. In the first ten days, map the parties whose systems or consent affect delivery and separate supplier claims from confirmed baselines. By day 20, draft the six compact fields with costs, measures, owners and regional variants. By day 30, test the draft with one representative from the utility or public system, workforce or education, and the affected community.

Return to the investment committee with three visible items: unresolved infrastructure costs, promises without an outcome measure and constituencies with no standing. Approve only when the economic case includes those dependencies and a named executive owns the public compact.

The aim is not to slow every project. It is to prevent a fast announcement from creating a slow delivery problem. The organisations that negotiate local value early will be better placed to secure capacity, talent and confidence when infrastructure competition intensifies.

**The 30-day request — one project, six public commitments, four represented constituencies and one independent measurement owner.**

## RESEARCH RECORD

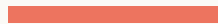
# Method and limitations

## Method

This influence and partnership radar compares official government policy, international energy analysis and attributed supplier announcements available by 21 August 2026. It separates announced inputs from realised outcomes and translates the recurring partnership pattern into a board-level local-value compact. The newest arXiv AI batch was reviewed separately as an R&D radar and did not displace the stronger leadership and partnership signal.

## Limitations

Most recent project benefits are commitments, estimates or conditional plans rather than independently verified long-term outcomes. Energy, water, planning, workforce and community authority differ substantially by place. The compact is an executive decision framework, not legal, engineering or investment advice.



## Sources and limitations

Source facts link to the original publication. Institute analysis reconciles definitions and turns the material into a management proposition. Frameworks are decision aids, not claims of universal causality. Read every important statistic with its population, date, definition and caveat.

Research cutoff: 21 August 2026. Review cycle: six months, or earlier after a material change in the underlying facts, standards or policy.

## REFERENCES

# Evidence behind the thesis

**01 OpenAI, OpenAI joins PORTS-Pike project**

Supplier announcement dated 17 August 2026; includes capacity ambition, supplier-estimated jobs, community commitments, reporting and future infrastructure dependencies.

**02 Australian Government, Expectations of data centres and AI infrastructure developers**

Official policy expectations announced 23 March 2026; frames social licence, energy, water, First Nations engagement, workforce and local capability.

**03 UK Government, Lanarkshire named latest AI Growth Zone**

Official announcement dated 29 January 2026; jobs and investment figures are developer supplied and delivery is conditional.

**04 IEA, Key Questions on Energy and AI**

2026 international analysis of demand, investment, infrastructure constraints and social acceptability.

**05 IEA, Energy and AI**

2025 international analysis with global demand projections and material regional differences.

**06 OpenAI, Stargate Community**

Supplier programme announcement dated 20 January 2026; site-specific community and infrastructure commitments require outcome verification.

**07 OpenAI, Introducing Stargate Norway**

Supplier and partner announcement dated 31 July 2025; planned capacity, cooling, heat reuse and local ecosystem access are not realised outcomes.

**08 UK Government, AI Growth Zones collection**

Official programme collection, current in 2026; provides the wider policy context for conditional growth-zone partnerships.

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