



Scope of Work: Local Policy Researcher/Land Use Expert (Independent Contractor)

Project Background: As the data center industry has rapidly expanded across the US, localities have been on the frontlines of policy change to protect constituents from the buildout. Faced with outdated regulatory systems that did not anticipate this extractive industry, local policymakers and advocates have experimented with a range of approaches, from explicit bans and moratoriums, to zoning reform, utility regulations, ending tax abatements, and monitoring and transparency. While there are many lessons learned, there is no universal playbook that works across all states; localities have to grapple with significant differences between state laws, preemption, zoning authority, and regional utility regulations.

This project aims to address this gap of state-specific recommendations, building on AI Now's [North Star Data Center Toolkit](#), which maps the strongest possible local, state, and federal policy interventions to stop and slow the data center buildout. We developed this resource in response to and in collaboration with numerous fights on the ground, as existing guides were either issue-specific or took a less-than-transformative approach. The toolkit has been successfully used across the US, primarily to set policy at the local and state-level, but we have not yet been able to offer state-by-state specifics.

As an initial pilot, the AI Now Institute, in partnership with Local Progress, plans to develop three state-specific guides defining local policy interventions for each state, including zoning and other areas. The project may expand over a longer timeline to include additional states.

Scope of Work: The Researcher will work with AI Now and Local Progress to (1) create three state-specific guides to local data center policy and (2) update our research template for other states. Tasks include:

- Review of existing AI Now and Local Progress materials (Toolkit, policy brief, draft research template for local policy recommendations) and existing state-specific guides
- Desk research to compare the Toolkit recommendations to each state's existing laws and regulations, to identify which policy interventions would be possible. This may include gray areas, where existing case law (such as around preemption) is not fully set.
- Interviews with state partners to understand the local context and workshop policy proposals, conducted alongside AI Now or Local Progress staff
- Organize the information into three draft guides
- Provision of feedback on research template, which will be shared with advocates and policymakers in states that the project is not covering

What You Bring:

We are looking for a researcher with at least 5-10 years of relevant experience, in the majority of the following areas:

- Deep understanding of zoning and land use, either from experience as a land use lawyer or in design and implementation of zoning/land use policy, ideally in multiple jurisdictions



- Additional familiarity or technical expertise in one or more of the following areas at the local/state level is a plus: Energy policy, utility regulation, water regulations, environmental law and policy, local and state policymaking
- Strong legal research and writing skills, ideally with experience communicating to both technical and layperson audiences
- Experience working on data center policy, or adjacent aspects of industrial development

Timeline: This engagement is expected to begin in early October 2026, with production of draft guides by November and final guides in December. The project has been scoped at roughly 75 hours of work, and there is the possibility of extension.

Compensation: \$10,000 in total, payable in monthly installments.

Independent Contractor Status: This engagement is for an independent contractor, not an employment position. The selected consultant will provide services on a contract basis and will be responsible for managing their own schedule and workspace, will not be eligible for employee benefits (such as health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off), and will be responsible for handling their own self-employment taxes.

Location: US/remote. While this contract opportunity is remote, there may be in-person meetings based on the contractor's location.

Required Submission Materials:

To be considered for this independent contractor engagement, please email the following materials to rfp@ainowinstitute.org by Monday, September 28, 2026, end of day.

- **Resume or Professional Profile:** A summary of your qualifications, specialized skills, and relevant past project experience.
- **Statement of Interest:** 2-3 paragraphs (maximum) explaining your interest in this project, your availability, and how your specific expertise/experience aligns with the project scope.
- **Writing Sample (3 pages maximum):** A technical or legal writing sample from your past portfolio (a legal research or policy memo is preferred). The sample must be your own unassisted work; please submit a document for which you were the sole author and that has not been substantially edited or revised by a third party.

AI Now is committed to the principle of equal opportunity, and our commitment extends to our contractor selection process.

Please Note: If you use AI for any part of your application, please disclose at the bottom of your cover letter which tools you used and how.

About Us: The [AI Now Institute](https://ainowinstitute.org) is a research and policy organization shaping AI in the public interest. We do not accept funding from corporate donors, including the tech industry we aim to



hold accountable. We have written extensively on [corporate power in the AI industry](#), [AI industrial policy](#), and the [climate costs of Big Tech](#).