INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS

Who Builds the Data Centers

What the Employment Record Can and Cannot Show

Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee

Data Center Policy Research

WORKFORCE

Prepared by Tommy Turner

Williamsburg and Christiansburg, Virginia

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WHO BUILDS THE DATA CENTERS

What the Employment Record Can and Cannot Show in Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee

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Author: Tommy N. Turner
Location: Williamsburg and Christiansburg, Virginia
Contact: tommy@gofast.pro
ORCID: 0009-0005-7422-9881
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SUMMARY

As of October 2026, jobs sit near the center of the public case for data centers in Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee. Each state ties its sales tax exemption to a job count, some Virginia counties write job commitments into performance agreements, and an industry-commissioned report puts Virginia's data center operations employment at 17,900 and its construction employment at 36,700. This volume asks what the available records can actually show about who builds these facilities and who staffs them, and it reads thirteen sources side by side to answer.

The construction trades are where the record runs out. None of the thirteen sources counts construction craft workers on a data center site in any of the three states. The union filings count members of electrical locals at the local's headquarters, and the federal employment census counts electrical-contractor jobs at the contractor's office; the union-density survey's published tables do not reach a single trade at the metropolitan level, and the construction figures in the sources read are either modeled or reported by the industry. A capture of 410 ads from a data center job board on October 19, 2026 found no ad, among those the board placed in the three states, for an electrician, pipefitter, ironworker, laborer, or apprentice on a construction site.

Operations jobs are better documented, and Virginia's figures for them run from more than 800 to 17,900, because they count different things: jobs added in a single year, a legislative staff estimate of the whole operating workforce, and an industry-commissioned estimate whose derivation the report does not state. The 1,610 net new jobs that exemption claimants reported for fiscal 2025 were, in the state's own words, "self-reported by data center operators and ... not independently validated." Among the sources read, the only delivered jobs anyone verified were under discretionary state grants.

The job ads add what the other sources lack, which is what employers require. Most hourly ads in Virginia and Georgia that state an experience figure ask for two years or less. The ads the job board labels "construction" are overwhelmingly for project managers, superintendents, estimators, and engineers; in Virginia and Georgia most of those that state a figure ask for five years or more, and in Tennessee 4 to 9 of 14 do. The ad-level captures are deposited with this volume.

PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHOD

This volume is a measurement map. It does not estimate how many people work on or in data centers. It sets out what each available source counts, whom it can see, and whom it cannot, so that a reader can tell what a jobs figure covers before citing it.

Thirteen sources were read: one data center job board; the hiring index its operator publishes; Indeed's research note on data center postings; a sixteen-year panel of electrical union membership filings; the federal Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages; the Current Population Survey's union membership tables; the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's 2024 report on Virginia data centers; Virginia's 2026 biennial report on the data center sales tax exemption; the Northern Virginia Technology Council's 2026 economic impact report; the three states' exemption statutes; two county performance agreements; the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's grant verification files; and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government's evaluation of Georgia's exemption. Each is described in Appendix A.

The job ads were captured on October 19, 2026 from Data Center JobHub, a board devoted to data center jobs that draws most of its listings from the career systems of the employers it monitors.[1] Every ad linked from the board's Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee pages was opened and its full text captured. Years of experience were extracted by pattern from each ad's required qualifications, not its preferred ones, and recorded two ways: the lowest figure the ad accepts, which is the easiest route where an ad offers alternatives, and the highest required figure, which binds where requirements stack. Ranges in this volume give both readings. Appendix B describes the files.

An ad is not a hire, one ad can cover several openings, and the board covers only the employers it monitors. The capture shows what those employers asked for on one day. Every negative claim in this volume states what it rests on: the sources read, the ads captured, or the statute text examined.

PART ONE: THE OPERATIONS NUMBERS IN CIRCULATION

Virginia has the most employment figures of the three states, and they are often quoted against one another. Table 1 sets them out.

Figure	What it is	Year	Who produced it, and how
About 50 per facility	Full-time workers at a typical 250,000-square-foot data center, about half of them contract workers	Reported 2024	Data center representatives, as reported by JLARC[2]
More than 800	New full-time jobs added	FY2023	JLARC[2]
Over 8,000	Full-time operations jobs, direct and contract	FY2023	JLARC staff estimate[2]
1,197 and 1,610	Net new jobs reported by exemption claimants	FY2024, FY2025	Operators, self-reported to the state's economic development partnership, not independently validated[3]
17,900	Operational workers statewide	2025	Industry council report prepared by Mangum Economics; a first-round direct figure entered into its input-output model; method for this count not stated[4]

None of these figures is wrong for what it measures, but they do not all measure the same thing. JLARC's 800 and the claimants' 1,610 are jobs added in a year. JLARC's 8,000 is a staff estimate of the operating workforce. The industry council's 17,900, two years later, is more than double JLARC's estimate, and the report's list of data sources does not name the federal employment census directly.[4] The difference between 8,000 and 17,900 may be growth, a broader definition, or a different method; the record read for this volume does not say which.

JLARC's per-facility figure is widely repeated, and it is a report of what "several data center representatives indicated," not a count.[2] It is also the number Virginia's statute asks for, since the exemption requires 50 new jobs for a data center outside a distressed locality.[5]

Georgia and Tennessee have no equivalent public series in the sources read. The Carl Vinson Institute's evaluation of Georgia's exemption describes the workforce of a data center as a small number of workers, "almost always less than 100 and more often less than 50," and offers no statewide count.[6]

PART TWO: WHAT THE JOB ADS SHOW

The capture of October 19, 2026 holds 410 ads: 233 in Virginia, 126 in Georgia, and 51 in Tennessee. Table 2 summarizes them.

October 19, 2026	Virginia	Georgia	Tennessee
Ads read	233	126	51
Employers	31	30	9
Largest employers	Amazon Data Services 76, NTT 19, CyrusOne 15, QTS 15	Amazon Data Services 26, Switch 13, Cushman & Wakefield 11, QTS 10	Oracle 19, xAI 13
Where	Northern Virginia 178; Richmond area 31; Fredericksburg, Stafford, Culpeper and Louisa counties 14; Boydton 6	Atlanta 77; Lithia Springs 14; Covington 5; Hampton 5	Nashville 28; Memphis 15; Clarksville 4
Hourly ads stating experience that ask 2 years or less	44–50 of 64	13–14 of 15	1 of 2
Board "construction" ads stating experience that ask 5 years or more	21–26 of 38	18–19 of 27	4–9 of 14
Ads for an electrician, pipefitter, ironworker, laborer, or apprentice on a construction site (board's state pages)	0	0	0

The first finding is that the operations jobs open to newcomers are real and are concentrated where data centers already run. Amazon's technician ads in Louisa County, Stafford, and Fredericksburg ask for one year of experience (one ad, read strictly, two) and pay $27.98 to $57.50 an hour.[1] Most hourly ads in Virginia and Georgia that state a figure ask for two years or less. Of Tennessee's 28 ads that state pay, 26 give an annual salary. No ad in the capture is placed in Southwest Virginia.

The second is that the board's "construction" label describes management and professional staff, not tradespeople. Its separate "electrician" label in Georgia and Tennessee holds four electrical superintendent ads and one operations electrician. In all three states its construction ads are mostly project and program managers,

superintendents, estimators, safety managers, engineers, and interns. Virginia's include one recruiter and one cabling foreman; Georgia's include two school-construction project manager ads. The certifications the board tags on Virginia's construction ads, a journeyman license on four and a master electrician license on three, sit on project manager ads at electrical contractors, not on electrician ads.[1] When a jobs figure built from these listings says that construction work demands five years of experience, it is describing managers, engineers, and estimators, not tradespeople.

The third is that construction craft work does not appear. No ad that the board places in any of the three states on the capture date is for an electrician, pipefitter, ironworker, laborer, or apprentice on a construction site. The nearest are the Virginia cabling foreman and an operations electrician at xAI in Memphis. The board's national electrician page does carry construction electrician ads elsewhere, including one in Texas and an xAI "Journeyman Electrician (Construction) - Memphis" ad that the board locates in Southaven, Mississippi.[7] Why none appears in these three states on this date is not established here.

No ad in the capture states that the position is union. Eleven Cushman & Wakefield ads in Atlanta carry standard pay wording noting that compensation may depend on whether a position is covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

PART THREE: WHAT EACH SOURCE CAN SEE

The construction workforce is where the sources diverge most, and each misses it for a different reason.

The electrical union filings give the most detailed series for a single trade. IBEW locals file annual reports with the Labor Department stating their membership, and a panel built from those filings covers sixteen years, 11,645 local-years and 786 filing organizations.[8] Among inside construction locals of at least 1,000 members, those in metropolitan areas where a large hyperscale operator published a campus grew 27.4 percentage points faster from 2010 to 2025 than those elsewhere, a result that holds on randomization tests and not on conventional clustered intervals.[9] The filings count members, not jobs, and place them at the local's headquarters address. A member working in another local's territory is counted by the home local. The filings cannot see non-union electrical construction at all, and non-union work's share of the trade in these metropolitan areas is not established.[9]

The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages counts every job reported to state unemployment insurance systems, union and non-union, with no sampling error. It assigns those jobs to the employer's reporting address rather than to the site where the work is done, so a contractor wiring a building in the next county reports the payroll at its headquarters.[10] The electrical-contractor codes used in the union panel's benchmark cover all electrical contractors, union and non-union, and are not restricted to inside construction.

The Current Population Survey's union tables give union membership by metropolitan area for private construction as a whole. In 2025 the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria metropolitan area showed 12.5 percent membership on 112 survey respondents, and the Richmond area 3.0 percent on 27.[11] The survey codes construction as one industry and leaves out the self-employed, and the database built from it publishes no table that crosses occupation with metropolitan area. Across all metro-years in private construction from 2010 to 2025, the median cell holds ten respondents.[12]

Indeed's research note on data center hiring is national. It finds that about 6 in every 1,000 US postings are data center related and that about a quarter of those are for installation and maintenance workers; the Washington, D.C. area stood at 8 percent of postings for the year through mid-July. Its method matches postings containing the term "data center" and, by its own account, "picks up roles that are not actually to do with data centers."[13] It gives no state-level figures for Virginia, Georgia, or Tennessee, a Washington-area figure that includes Northern Virginia, and nothing on experience.

The construction figures in the sources read are modeled or reported by the industry. JLARC's statement that "approximately 1,500 workers are on site" at the height of a facility's construction is attributed to data center representatives.[2] Its estimate of 28,000 direct construction jobs a year and the industry council's 36,700 construction jobs are outputs or inputs of economic impact models, not counts of workers on sites.[2][4]

PART FOUR: PROMISED JOBS AND DELIVERED JOBS

All three states set a job threshold for the sales tax exemption. Virginia requires 50 new jobs paying "at least one and one-half times the prevailing average wage in that locality," with $150 million invested, reduced to 10 jobs and $70 million in a distressed locality.[5] Georgia, since its 2022 amendments, requires 25, 10, or 5 new quality jobs depending on county population.[14] Tennessee requires 15 net new full-time jobs paying 150 percent of the state's average occupational wage, with more than $100 million invested within three years, a period the commissioner may extend.[15]

Virginia's statute asks more of claimants than either of the other two in the text read. A data center operator must sign a memorandum of understanding with the state's economic development partnership that sets out "the repayment obligations should those goals not be achieved," and must file an annual report that includes "employment levels, capital investments, average annual wages."[5] The Department of Taxation and the partnership publish a biennial report in aggregate. The 2026 report gives 1,610 net new jobs for fiscal 2025 and states that the data "was self-reported by data center operators and was not independently validated by VEDP or the Department."[3] The statute also permits the partnership to publish "annual information indicating the job creation and ranges of capital investments made by a data center operator," in a format developed with the operators.[5] No such operator-level publication was found among the sources read.

In the Georgia and Tennessee statute text examined for this volume (Georgia's as enacted in HB 1291; Georgia's revenue rule was not read), no job-reporting provision and no recapture tied to jobs was found. The performance bond the Carl Vinson Institute describes for Georgia, forfeitable if the investment is not met, is tied to the investment threshold.[6][14][15]

The two county agreements read differ sharply. Botetourt County's agreement with Google's entity, Helio Capital LLC, commits "not fewer than fifty (50) new full-time jobs at a median salary of at least $86,000" for each data center built, and sets no measurement date, no jobs report, no audit right, and no clawback.[16] Pittsylvania County's agreement sets 0.53 jobs per gross acre and prices a shortfall at $5,000 per job per measurement period.[17]

Among the sources read, the one verified series of delivered jobs comes from discretionary state grants. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership publishes post-performance verification files for each grant. In Mecklenburg County every Microsoft grant closed "Metrics Achieved," and the file for the 2019 expansion verified 387 jobs against a 108-job target, at an average wage of $90,092.[18] Those

files count what the grant contract counts. They do not separate Microsoft's own staff from contractors, and they cover grants, not the exemption.

PART FIVE: WHAT COULD BE COUNTED

Two of the gaps in this record can be closed with instruments already written, and the third needs a new one.

Virginia's statute already requires each data center operator holding an exemption memorandum to report its employment levels annually, and already authorizes the partnership to publish job creation by operator. Publishing it, and checking it against the state's unemployment insurance wage records, would let an operator's own direct jobs be tested against its memorandum; contract and tenant jobs, which the statute counts collectively, would need a separate check.

Counties writing performance agreements can set a measurement date and a price for shortfall, as Pittsylvania's agreement does, and can add a jobs report and an audit right, all four of which Botetourt's leaves out.

The construction workforce is the gap no instrument read for this volume reaches. A locality approving a campus could require the developer to report the on-site construction workforce at stated milestones, by trade and by whether workers were hired locally. Until a public body asks, the construction jobs cited for these projects will remain the jobs that none of the records read for this volume counts.

APPENDIX A: THE SOURCES

Source	What it counts and who it can see	What it cannot see
Data Center JobHub job ads, captured October 19, 2026[1]	Live ads from employers the board monitors, with full ad text: experience, certifications, shift, pay where stated, location. Operations staff and salaried construction management.	Construction craft workers (none in the three states on the capture date). Hires and headcount. Employers the board does not monitor. Monitoring began August 21, 2026; the board's own experience method is unpublished.
JobHub hiring index, August 2026 edition[7]	National aggregates by state, role family, and employer; pay medians. CC BY 4.0.	Experience. State-by-role detail. One edition published as of the evidence snapshot.
Indeed Hiring Lab, July 14, 2026[13]	National postings matching "data center"; occupation mix; pay premium.	State figures; experience; postings unrelated to data centers that the keyword match picks up.
IBEW local membership panel, 2010–2025[8][9]	Members of every filing IBEW local, placed at the local's headquarters; inside construction locals identified from the union's jurisdiction maps.	Non-union electrical work; other trades; employment; where members actually work. Retired and unemployed members are counted.
Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages[10]	All jobs in an industry and county, union and non-union, from unemployment insurance filings.	The job site (jobs sit at the employer's reporting address); occupation within the industry; suppressed counties.
CPS union membership tables[11][12]	Union share of wage and salary workers in private construction, by metropolitan area.	Any single trade at metro level; the self-employed. Median metro cell of ten respondents.
JLARC Report 598, December 2024[2]	Industry-reported staffing per facility; staff estimates of operations jobs; modeled construction-phase jobs.	A measured count of construction workers. Georgia and Tennessee.
Virginia biennial exemption report, January 2026[3]	Net new jobs reported by exemption claimants, in aggregate.	Anything validated; operator-level figures.
NVTC economic impact report, February 2026[4]	Operational and construction employment entered into an input-output model; multiplier estimates.	Independent measurement; the method behind its direct employment counts. Georgia and Tennessee.

Source	What it counts and who it can see	What it cannot see
State exemption statutes[5][14][15]	Jobs required to claim the exemption.	Jobs created. Virginia requires annual employment reporting; no job-reporting provision found in the Georgia or Tennessee text read.
County performance agreements[16][17]	Jobs committed in exchange for local incentives.	Delivery, unless the agreement requires reporting.
VEDP grant verification files[18]	Jobs and investment verified against grant targets.	Anything outside a discretionary grant; direct versus contract workers.
Carl Vinson Institute evaluation, December 2025[6]	Georgia's thresholds and their history; a description of typical staffing.	A count of jobs created under the exemption.

APPENDIX B: THE DATA FILES

Three files are deposited with this volume, one per state: JobHub_VA_Ads_2026-10-19.csv (233 rows), JobHub_GA_Ads_2026-10-19.csv (126 rows), and JobHub_TN_Ads_2026-10-19.csv (51 rows). Each row is one ad as it stood on October 19, 2026.

The columns are the ad's path on the board (append it to datacenterjobhub.com/jobs/ to open the ad while it remains live), the board's role family, employer, city, pay unit (hourly, annual, or not listed), pay as listed, the lowest and highest required years of experience, the lowest preferred years, the certifications the board tags, and the title. Blank experience fields mean no figure was found in a required section.

Years were extracted by pattern from each ad's text, covering digits, number words, ranges, and figures written with a plus sign. Lines under a heading for preferred, desired, or bonus qualifications were treated as preferred. Background-check intervals and company-age statements were excluded. Any row can be checked by opening its ad while it remains live. Ad text belongs to the employers who published it and is not reproduced in the files.

The board's own Georgia page reported 130 live jobs on the capture date; 126 distinct ads were linked from its pages. Virginia's and Tennessee's page counts matched the ads read.

ENDNOTES

[1] Data Center JobHub, state pages https://datacenterjobhub.com/jobs/virginia, /jobs/georgia, and /jobs/tennessee, and every ad linked from them, read October 19, 2026. Ad-level captures deposited with this volume (Appendix B). Amazon's Louisa County, Stafford, and Fredericksburg technician ads, including Infra Delivery Install Technician and Engineering Operations Technician: $27.98–$48.99 and $32.88–$57.50 an hour. Project manager ads carrying the tags: EMCOR Group (three electrical project manager ads, Richmond, journeyman and master electrician) and IES Holdings (one project manager ad, Chester, journeyman).

[2] Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, *Data Centers in Virginia*, Report 598, December 9, 2024, p. 13 ("several data center representatives indicated that a typical 250,000-square-foot data center may have approximately 50 full-time workers"; "over 8,000 full-time jobs in FY23"; "more than 800 new full-time jobs"), pp. 13–14 ("approximately 1,500 workers are on site"), and p. 16 (59,000 jobs annually during the construction phase, including 28,000 construction workers).

[3] Virginia Department of Taxation, in collaboration with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership Authority, *Biennial Data Center Retail Sales and Use Tax Exemption Report*, January 2, 2026 (RD40, 2026), https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2026/RD40/PDF, pp. 2–3 and Table 1.

[4] Northern Virginia Technology Council, *The Impact of Data Centers on Virginia's State and Local Economies*, 6th biennial report, prepared by Mangum Economics, February 2026, pp. 12–13 and 17 (17,900 operational jobs; 36,700 construction jobs; 112,880 supported jobs) and p. 38 (data sources).

[5] Code of Virginia § 58.1-609.3(18), https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title58.1/chapter6/section58.1-609.3/, read October 19, 2026. JLARC (note 2, p. 19) gives the distressed-locality investment threshold as $75 million; the statute's text reads $70 million.

[6] Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, evaluation of Georgia's high-technology data center equipment sales tax exemption, December 2025, Table 1 and PDF pp. 13 and 21.

[7] Data Center JobHub, https://datacenterjobhub.com/data-center-electrician-jobs, read October 19, 2026; US Data Center Hiring Index, August 2026 edition, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.22261857.

[8] Tommy N. Turner, *IBEW Local Union Membership Panel, 2010–2025*, dataset, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.22862472; *Counting a Trade in One Metropolitan Area*, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.22861996.

[9] Tommy N. Turner, *Membership Grew Faster Than Employment*, research note, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.22866646, abstract and section on limits.

[10] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, NAICS 23821 and 238212, as used and described in *Counting a Trade in One Metropolitan Area* (note 8).

[11] Barry T. Hirsch, David A. Macpherson, and William E. Even, *Union Membership, Coverage, and Earnings from the CPS* (2026), https://unionstats.com, metropolitan tables, private construction, 2025.

[12] Computed from the same tables across 4,069 metro-years carrying a private-construction row, 2010–2025, as reported in *Counting a Trade in One Metropolitan Area* (note 8).

[13] Aubrey Woessner and Laura Ullrich, "Hiring for the Data Center Build-Out," Indeed Hiring Lab, July 14, 2026, https://www.hiringlab.org/2026/07/14/hiring-for-the-data-center-build-out/.

[14] O.C.G.A. § 48-8-3(68.1), as amended by Georgia HB 1291 (2022), as signed, https://gov.georgia.gov/document/2022-signed-legislation/hb-1291/download; thresholds and the quality-job definition as summarized in the Carl Vinson Institute evaluation (note 6), Table 1 and PDF p. 13.

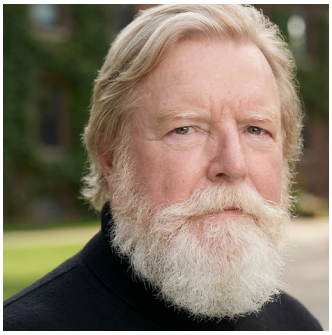
[15] Tenn. Code Ann. § 67-6-102(81) (definition of qualified data center) and § 67-6-206, 2025 code, via Justia, https://law.justia.com/codes/tennessee/title-67/chapter-6/.

[16] Economic Development Performance Agreement among Botetourt County, the Economic Development Authority of Botetourt County, and Helio Capital LLC, effective June 24, 2025, § 4.2, as examined in *Case Study: Botetourt County*, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20673512.

[17] Local performance agreement, Pittsylvania County, § 5(c), as examined in *Case Study: Pittsylvania County*, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.22968398.

[18] Virginia Economic Development Partnership, incentive post-performance reports, as examined in *Case Study: Mecklenburg County*, concept DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20673484.

About the Author



Tommy N. Turner is an independent researcher and writer who documents the local-government and energy dimensions of the data center build-out in Virginia, Georgia, and Tennessee. His series of jurisdiction-level case studies covers the Virginia counties where data center decisions have been made, refused, or contested, and the analytical volumes extend the work into the statewide systems those decisions run on. Like the rest of the series, this volume is assembled from primary records and public data. He writes opinion and analysis on Virginia public affairs for outlets including the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Virginia Mercury*, and *Cardinal News*. The case studies and analytical volumes are published as open, citable editions, revised as the record moves. He works from Williamsburg and Christiansburg, Virginia.

Contact tommy@gofast.pro · tommynturner.com · ORCID 0009-0005-7422-9881