



INITIATIVE BRIEF

January 28, 2026

DATA CENTER PREPAREDNESS

Significant data center projects are rapidly emerging across the region, bringing with them tight timelines, high owner expectations, and limited visibility into scope and sequencing. Because these projects are confidential and competitive, critical details remain fragmented, leaving our organizations without the unified strategy needed to support contractors, protect jurisdiction, and secure the manpower required during an already strained labor market. This briefing outlines the steps Local 98, Local 636, and MCA Detroit are taking to prepare—strengthening our information pipeline, aligning on manpower strategy, and establishing a coordinated approach to ensure readiness as these projects move closer to execution.

Prepared By:

Gregory S. Johnson, MPA, MSLOC
Chief Operating Officer

UNITY THROUGH TRUST - LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE - STRENGTH THROUGH BONDS

Initial Request for Collaboration

From: Greg Johnson

Sent: Thursday, January 1, 2026 6:49 PM

To: Gary Glaser <gglaser98@ualocal98.org>; 'lkrisniski@pipefitters636.org' <lkrisniski@pipefitters636.org>; Chris Freeman <cfreeman@mcadetroit.org>

Cc: Bill James <bjames@mcadetroit.org>; 'jregits@pipefitters636.org' <jregits@pipefitters636.org>

Subject: All Hands Meeting - Data Center Strategy Planning

Happy New Year!

We are reaching out to request an all-hands meeting with leadership from Local 98, Local 636, and MCA Detroit regarding the significant data center projects now headed toward our region. Based on the information available to us, these projects appear to be both large in scale and fast-moving, and at this time we are not adequately prepared from a logistical or strategic standpoint.

Given the potential impact on manpower, scheduling, jurisdictional coordination, and contractor readiness, we believe it is essential that top leadership from all three organizations (whomever you think that should be) meet as soon as possible to align on a unified approach.

Specifically, we would like to discuss:

- Establishing a process for receiving advanced notice and project timelines
- Manpower forecasting and coordinated staffing strategies
- Standardized procedures and expectations for contractors and signatory employers
- Safety, compliance, and training considerations unique to data center work
- Communication protocols between our organizations as project details evolve
- Post-construction considerations
- Any additional strategic or operational issues we should anticipate together

Our goal is to ensure that all parties are aligned early, prepared to respond effectively, and positioned to support our contractors and members with clarity and confidence. We also believe early coordination will be critical to the success of these projects and to maintaining the high standards our organizations are known for.

Lary/Jake- 98 and MCA are good for this day, if you guys can swing it, too!

Proposed Date: Wednesday, 1.7.26, following the JAC Meeting OR 12pm – 4pm (window), Location: TBD

Please let us know if this date, time, and location works for you and your team.

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Data Center Preparedness Initiative Brief

Significant data center projects are moving toward our region with limited advance notice. These projects are large-scale, schedule-compressed, and require coordinated action across Local 98, Local 636, and MCA Detroit. Since these projects represent both a major opportunity and a significant operational challenge, early coordination between Local 98, Local 636, and MCA Detroit is essential to ensure readiness, protect jurisdiction, support contractors, and maintain the high standards expected of our organizations.

Due to confidentiality and competitive pressures, project details remain incomplete or fragmented across organizations, making it difficult to form a clear picture of scope, timeline, and stakeholder involvement. At present, there is no unified strategy in place to address critical issues such as manpower, logistics, or jurisdictional alignment. Meanwhile, owners and general contractors in the tech sector are operating with high expectations for rapid mobilization and strict compliance standards. As these projects unfold, MCA Detroit, Local 98, and Local 636 will inevitably be drawn into the problem-solving process and must prepare to navigate the resulting complexity with clarity and coordination.

Strategic Priorities

1. Establish a Unified Intelligence Picture
 - What we know, what we don't know, and how we will close the gaps
 - Identify project owners, GCs, timelines, and anticipated scopes
2. Create an Advanced Notice & Communication Protocol
 - Define how information flows between the three organizations
 - Set expectations for rapid updates and coordinated responses
3. Manpower Forecasting & Workforce Readiness
 - Initial manpower ranges and peak demand
 - Apprenticeship pipeline capacity
 - Overtime, shift work, and fatigue management considerations
4. Contractor Preparedness & Standardized Procedures
 - Required documentation and pre-planning
 - Safety, compliance, and training requirements
 - Standardized onboarding and site-specific protocols
5. Jurisdictional Alignment
 - Identify potential gray areas early
 - Agree on unified interpretations
 - Establish a rapid dispute-resolution process
6. Risk Identification & Mitigation
 - Manpower shortages
 - Compressed schedules
 - Contractor readiness gaps
 - Jurisdictional disputes
 - Owner-driven changes or accelerated timelines

Data Center Meeting Agenda and Essential Questions

Data Center Project Preparedness & Unified Strategy

MCA Detroit – UA Local 98 – UA Local 636

January 7th, 2026 – Asher Kelly Board Room

1. Current Intelligence Review

- **What we know today**

What confirmed information do we currently have about owners, GCs, timelines, and scope?

- **What we don't know**

What critical details are missing, and who is best positioned to obtain them?

- **Who has which pieces of information**

How do we consolidate scattered intel into a shared picture?

- **How fragmented intel is affecting readiness**

Where is uncertainty creating risk, delay, or confusion for our organizations or contractors?

2. Establishing an Advanced Notice & Information Pipeline

- **How do we get earlier, more reliable project information**

What relationships, agreements, or processes must be strengthened to improve early notice?

- **Who should be the first point of contact**

Which organization or role should receive initial intel and trigger the communication chain?

- **How information flows between the three organizations**

What is the fastest, cleanest, most reliable method for sharing updates?

- **How we communicate updates to contractors and members**

What messaging structure ensures consistency and prevents mixed signals?

3. Manpower Forecasting & Workforce Strategy

- **Expected manpower ranges and peak demand**

What manpower scenarios should we model (low, medium, high)?

- **Current workforce capacity vs. projected needs**

Where are our gaps, and how severe are they?

- **Apprenticeship pipeline readiness**

Do we need to accelerate recruitment or adjust class sizes?

- **Recruitment, retention, and accelerated training options**

What levers can we pull now to expand capacity?

- **Overtime, shift work, fatigue management**

How do we protect members while meeting peak demand?

- **How to avoid over-committing or under-supplying contractors**

What safeguards ensure we allocate manpower responsibly and equitably?

4. Contractor Preparedness & Standardized Expectations

- **What contractors will need from us**
What guidance, documentation, or protocols must we provide to ensure readiness?
- **What we will need from contractors**
What information must contractors supply early to support manpower planning?
- **Standardized procedures for:**
 - **Pre-planning**
What pre-planning documents should be required before manpower is committed?
 - **Documentation**
What forms, checklists, or templates should be standardized across all signatories?
 - **Safety and compliance**
What minimum safety expectations must contractors meet before mobilizing?
 - **Onboarding and badging**
How do we streamline onboarding to avoid delays and confusion?

5. Jurisdictional Alignment

- **Identify likely gray areas**
Which scopes of work are most vulnerable to overlap or dispute?
- **Agree on unified interpretations**
What shared jurisdictional stance will we communicate to contractors and owners?
- **Establish a rapid dispute-resolution process**
How do we resolve issues quickly without disrupting the project?
- **Ensure consistent communication to contractors and owners**
Who speaks for the group, and how do we maintain message discipline?

7. Risk Identification & Mitigation

- **Manpower shortages**
What is our contingency plan if demand exceeds supply?
- **Compressed schedules**
How do we prepare for accelerated timelines or late-breaking changes?
- **Contractor readiness gaps**
Which contractors may struggle, and how do we support or correct them?
- **Jurisdictional disputes**
What early actions prevent disputes from escalating?
- **Owner-driven changes**
How do we stay agile when owners shift scope or sequencing?
- **Communication breakdowns**
What systems ensure information doesn't get lost or siloed?

8. Action Items, Assignments & Next Steps

- **Immediate tasks**
What must be done in the next 48–72 hours?
- **Who owns what**
Which organization or individual is responsible for each action?
- **Deadlines**
What are the required timelines for each deliverable?
- **Schedule follow-up meeting**
When do we reconvene to maintain momentum and accountability?

Next Steps

Because of the confidential nature of these projects, specific company details cannot be disclosed within this brief; however, the committee was able to consolidate its collective knowledge regarding anticipated project locations, general contractors, timelines, and workforce expectations. Through this discussion, the group examined key strategic considerations—including projected manpower needs, equipment requirements, project scale, contractor expectations, potential reliance on apprentices, specialized training demands, material-handling implications, and broader market-share concerns. The committee also reviewed how other trades are preparing and explored options such as organizing blitzes, traveler utilization, and adjustments to apprenticeship class sizes. To strengthen coordination moving forward, the group established a schedule for monthly meetings, agreed on a consistent communication method, and designated MCA Detroit’s COO as the central information hub.

In addition, the group supported the idea of holding quarterly Superintendent meetings, recognizing that regular engagement with field leadership will not only support data-center readiness but also improve manpower forecasting and early issue detection across all major projects. The committee also identified critical relationships to leverage for additional intelligence, including municipal contacts, utility partners, owners, GCs, superintendents, contractors, and local/association leadership. Looking ahead, the group emphasized the need for contractor guarantees regarding apprentice placement prior to project kickoff and outlined essential questions contractors must answer—covering workforce needs, classifications, timelines, equipment, fabrication requirements, and training expectations. These steps will guide our continued preparation as more information becomes available and as the region moves closer to project execution.

Request for Manpower Forecasting

From: Chris Freeman <cfreeman@mcadetroit.org>

Sent: Friday, January 23, 2026 5:24 PM

To: 16 Contractors

Subject: MCA Detroit is attempting to determine future manpower needs.

Contractor-

MCA Detroit is attempting to determine future manpower needs due to data center work and other projects, but mainly data centers. We are working with Local 98 and 636 to gather information on work in the area for the foreseeable future. Your co-operation would be greatly appreciated and would help us better understand how many people are needed, when they will be needed and what skills they will need. Your answers will provide us the essential information we need to make decisions regarding the number of Apprentices to accept, the training we provide them and how great the need to is increase our organizing efforts to meet your future manpower needs.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you currently have the workforce necessary to perform work you have been awarded or anticipate being awarded If not, what are your anticipated additional manpower needs and when do you anticipate needing this additional manpower?
2. Please share start dates and expected peak manpower timeframes if possible.
3. What classifications will you need? (Journeymen, Apprentices, MET, MES, etc.)
4. What certifications will these individuals need? (Rigging, welding, specialized refrigerant training, etc.)
5. Do you anticipate any special equipment needs (for service, rigging classifications)?
6. Do you anticipate to utilize fabrication? Do you expect to self-perform or team up with someone who currently has fabrication capabilities?
7. If Apprentices will be needed, are you willing to guarantee placement prior to project kickoff?

Are there any additional details/information you believe to be relevant. Please let me know.

Thank you,

Chris Freeman, CAE, GBA, TMP

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Contractor Response Brief

Contractor responses indicate that while some firms currently have adequate staffing for awarded work, all anticipate significant additional manpower needs as large data center projects begin to ramp up. The email request was sent to 16 companies that collectively account for approximately 65% of all hours worked in our industry, providing a highly representative snapshot of regional capacity and anticipated strain. Forecasts show substantial increases in both shop and field personnel, with several contractors projecting needs ranging from 30–40 additional plumbers to as many as 100–200 craft workers between mid-2026 and 2027. Most respondents expect major manpower ramps beginning in March/April 2026 and continuing through late 2027, with some projecting elevated staffing needs for the foreseeable future due to multi-year project durations and overlapping high-profile work.

Across the board, contractors anticipate needing a mix of journeymen, apprentices, welders, foremen, general foremen, MES, and specialty classifications. Certifications such as welding, rigging, med-gas, and refrigerant training (particularly for data center systems) were repeatedly identified as critical. Fabrication will play a major role: some contractors plan heavy self-perform fabrication, others expect to expand shop capacity, and several anticipate subcontracting or cross-contractor collaboration depending on schedule demands.

Most contractors expressed willingness to guarantee apprentice placement prior to project kickoff, though one noted they must confirm with operations. Additional concerns include the impact of potential labor actions (e.g., a June strike), the need to coordinate with Local 636, and the risk that simultaneous data center projects could strain both current backlog and regional labor availability. Several contractors also flagged the likelihood of traveler utilization and the need to coordinate with neighboring locals (85, 190).

Detailed Contractor Responses (Organized by Question)

1. Workforce Sufficiency & Anticipated Additional Needs

- Contractor A:
 - Too early to call for the year.
 - Will need 30 additional shop workers and 30 additional field workers beyond current workforce.
- Contractor B:
 - No, insufficient workforce.
 - Needs 100–200 craft workers.
 - Peak need: mid-2026 through 2027.
 - Anticipates use of travelers; significant labor expected in Locals 85 and 190.
- Contractor C:
 - Will need 15–20 additional plumbers this summer.
- Contractor D:
 - Needs 30–40 additional plumbers in Q4 2026–early 2027.
 - Notes ongoing shortage of skilled plumbers despite adequate headcount.
 - Expects elevated manpower needs for 1–3 year project durations and beyond.

2. Start Dates & Peak Manpower Timeframes

- Contractor A:
 - Ramping up March 2026 through end of 2027.
- Contractor B:
 - Mid-2026 through 2027
- Contractor C:
 - Ramp begins March/April.
- Contractor D:
 - Q4 2026 through Q3 2027, with elevated needs continuing indefinitely.

3. Classifications Needed

- Contractor A:
 - Welders, journeymen, apprentices.
- Contractor B:
 - All classifications (Journeymen, Apprentices, MET, MES, etc.).
- Contractor C:
 - Journeymen and apprentices.
- Contractor D:
 - Journeymen, Apprentices, Foremen, General Foremen, MES.

4. Required Certifications

- Contractor A:
 - Welding, rigging.
- Contractor B:
 - Rigging, welding, refrigerant training (some welding expected to be done in fab shops).
- Contractor C:
 - 5–6 Med Gas certified, plus 636 refrigeration techs.
- Contractor D:
 - Rigging, welding, and refrigerant training (data center-specific).

5. Special Equipment Needs

- Contractor A:
 - Rigging equipment, welder certifications.
- Contractor B:
 - None identified; Local 190 wants to prepare for post-construction service equipment.
- Contractor C:
 - None at this time.
- Contractor D:
 - Refrigerant system equipment, large-equipment rigging.

6. Fabrication Expectations

- Contractor A:
 - Heavy fabrication in their shop; self-perform; may fabricate for others if opportunities arise.
- Contractor B:
 - Extensive self-perform fabrication; seeking additional space.
 - May collaborate with other contractors but no formal team-ups expected.
- Contractor C:
 - Possibly will utilize fabrication.
- Contractor D:
 - Fabrication will be extensive.
 - Mix of self-perform and subcontract.
 - Not likely to use fabrication capacity within the local.

7. Apprentice Placement Guarantees

- Contractor A: Yes.
- Contractor B: Likely yes, pending operations confirmation.
- Contractor C: Yes.
- Contractor D:
 - Will hire apprentices at normal ratios.
 - Open to higher apprentice ratios, but only with sufficient skilled journeypersons.

8. Additional Relevant Information

- Contractor A:
 - No additional notes.
- Contractor B:
 - Already involved in one major data center.
 - Concerned that multiple overlapping projects could “get out of hand” and impact backlog.
- Contractor C:
 - No additional notes.
- Contractor D:
 - Notes long-term elevated manpower needs due to multi-year project cycles.