



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Botetourt County

Program Title: "Hey Google, is BOCO Getting a Data Center?"

Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Brent Watts

Title: Director of Communications

Department: Office of Communications

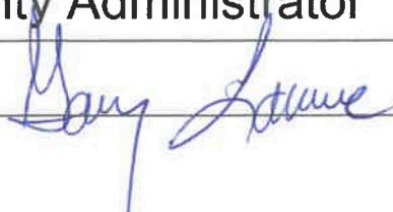
Telephone: 540-928-2004 Website: botetourtva.gov

Email: bwatts@botetourtva.gov

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Gary Larrowe

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

# Hey Google, We're Getting a Data Center

## Botetourt County – 2026 VACo Achievement Award Entry

### Executive Summary

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In June 2025, Botetourt County launched a comprehensive public information initiative following the announcement of a proposed Google data center campus in the Botetourt Center at Greenfield, the County's industrial park. As public interest grew rapidly, residents sought timely and accurate information regarding water usage, electric infrastructure, environmental impacts, and economic benefits.

Because much of that information rested with outside partners, including Google and utility providers, the County built a collaborative communications model to gather trusted facts about the data center and create a portal for citizens to learn more about the project. Using the existing CivicPlus content management system, the communications team created a dedicated project website organized around topic-specific sections on technology, water, electricity, environment, and the local economy.

The initiative expanded beyond the website to include social media videos, community testimonials, and a new podcast series, County Conversations, focused on data center issues. The result was a centralized, trusted source of information that improved transparency, reduced misinformation, and created a replicable model for local governments managing large-scale economic development announcements.

### The Challenge

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Following the June 2025 announcement of the proposed Google data center, public attention to the project intensified immediately. Residents wanted clear answers about potential impacts on water supply, electric service, environmental stewardship, traffic, and long-term economic value. At the same time, misinformation spread quickly through social media and word of mouth across the County and the surrounding region. Because Google had limited public-facing communication during the proposal stage, citizens increasingly turned to County government as their primary information source. This

created a significant challenge: the County owned the land and stood to benefit from the sale and resulting economic development, but it was not the direct operator of utilities or the holder of technical infrastructure data for the data center project. The key challenges included:

- Rapidly growing public demand for detailed technical information the County did not directly control
- Active spread of misinformation on social media requiring proactive factual responses
- The need to coordinate verified information across multiple private and public partners
- Balancing transparency with information that was still under development by project partners
- Serving diverse audiences, from technically sophisticated stakeholders to general community members, with clear, accessible content

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## Google Data Center



## Google Advances Botetourt County Data Center Campus Project

In collaboration with Google, Botetourt County has announced progress on Google's planned data center campus at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield, marking a transformative investment in the County's economic future while reinforcing its commitment to responsible development. [READ THE PRESS RELEASE>>](#)



If you've made it to this website, had a telehealth appointment, ordered tickets, checked your bank account, scrolled Facebook, asked AI to create a meme, or streamed TV or movies, you've relied on a data center.

The term may sound new or futuristic, but data centers have existed in some form for decades—starting as small, behind-the-scenes computer rooms that powered early business and government systems. Now they have

[RELATED DOCUMENTS](#)

[ASK A QUESTION](#)

[LOOKING TO BE A VENDOR?](#)

## Program Description

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Rather than relying on traditional press releases or scattered updates, the County created a dedicated, issue-specific website focused entirely on the proposed data center. Using the existing CivicPlus CMS platform, with no new software purchases, the communications department designed and launched a custom microsite, *botetourtva.gov/google*, which organized answers to citizen questions into user-friendly categories:

- Technology — explaining what a data center is and how the proposed facility would function
- Water — detailing projected water usage, sources, and conservation considerations
- Electricity — outlining power requirements and utility coordination
- Environment — addressing environmental review, stewardship commitments, and mitigation
- Economy — quantifying land sale revenue, tax base growth, and long-term economic benefits

## Multi-Channel Outreach

Recognizing that County citizens consume information in different ways, the communications department supplemented the website with several media campaigns that pushed users back to the County's website. These included:

- Submit a Question — a citizen portal for submitting questions directly to County staff
- Short-form social media videos addressing the most common public concerns
- Community testimonials from regional leaders and stakeholders
- [BOCO "County Conversations"](#) — a new podcast series featuring in-depth discussions about the data center project and related community issues



## **Proactive Document Release**

Rather than waiting for FOIA requests, the County proactively uploaded official project documents to the microsite, reducing the administrative burden of FOIA requests while increasing public trust and transparency.

## **Collaboration & Partnerships**

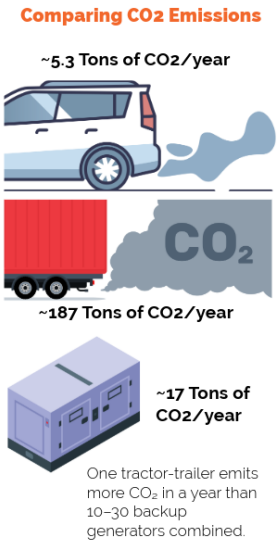
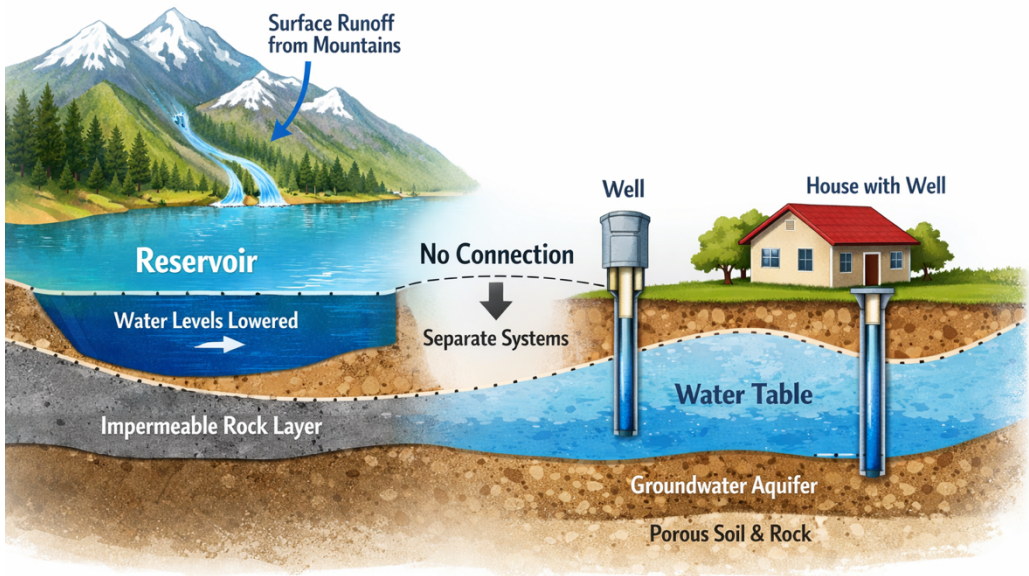
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This initiative required extensive coordination across internal departments and external organizations. The collaborative structure was central to the program's effectiveness. We worked with the County Administrator and departments, and spent weeks gathering information, conducting interviews, and verifying details with partners to ensure all published information was accurate, balanced, and understandable to general audiences.

## **Implementation**

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The project was led by the Botetourt County Communications Office with support from administration, departmental leadership, and technical staff. No outside consultants were hired for the core initiative. Local government staff designed, wrote, produced, and managed all content. No new software purchases or budget appropriations were required to complete the project. The project incorporated the creation of custom infographics to deliver a better understanding of the project and debunk misconceptions.



## Results & Impacts

The Data Center communications campaign achieved measurable outcomes, including boosting public engagement and transparency. Not only did we better manage the information flow across the County, but also encouraged citizens to continue asking questions to be included on the site.

<p><b>Transparency &amp; Trust</b></p>	<p>Established a centralized, trusted source of project information; proactive document release increased public confidence</p>
<p><b>Misinformation Reduction</b></p>	<p>Factual, easily accessible content reduced confusion and countered rumors circulating on social media</p>

<b>Citizen Engagement</b>	Expanded public participation through the question portal, social media videos, and podcast series
<b>Partnership Strengthening</b>	Deepened relationships with Google, utility partners, and regional stakeholders through ongoing collaboration
<b>Replicable Framework</b>	Produced a documented, transferable communications model ready for other high-interest development projects

## **Model for Other Virginia Localities**

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This initiative is directly transferable to any Virginia locality facing high-interest economic development, infrastructure, or land-use announcements. The program requires no specialized technology, no outside consultants, and no significant new budget. Our success came from listening intently to our County residents and deliberate planning, internal coordination, and commitment to transparency.

Several key elements other localities can replicate:

- Use existing CMS platforms (CivicPlus, Granicus, Squarespace, or similar) to launch a dedicated project microsite quickly
- Organize complex technical topics into audience-friendly categories rather than lengthy press releases
- Share public documents proactively to reduce FOIA burden and signal openness
- Build a citizen question portal to invite two-way dialogue and gather questions

- Supplement print/web content with short videos and audio for audiences who do not read long-form content
- Invest in partner coordination upfront, verified information from utility and private-sector partners was the foundation of public trust
- Update content regularly and consistently to maintain credibility

Learn more about the Google Data Center Project in Botetourt at:

**<https://www.botetourtva.gov/google>**