

A Montana AI Task Force

AI for Montana | August 2026 | Proposal

NorthWestern Energy has signed letters of intent with three data center developers for as much as 1,400 megawatts by 2030, against a current total load near 750, with eleven more companies in earlier stages of inquiry. Microsoft ranks Montana among the five lowest AI adoption states in the country. These are the same problem, and no body in this state is working them together.

WHAT OTHER STATES BUILT

Vermont, Utah, and California each stood up an AI body this year. Vermont runs three working groups on a 90-day first deliverable with quarterly briefings to the Governor. Utah organized six pillars around a single idea: that people stay in control of the tools that shape their work.

None of them covers energy, water, or minerals. Vermont's task force is chaired by a utility CEO and still has no infrastructure workstream.

Meanwhile twenty-seven states are legislating on data center load, and Arizona convened a separate 36-member energy task force. The work is happening, just in separate rooms. Montana can build one body that holds both.

THE CHARGE

Position Montana to compete in an AI economy and to set its own terms on what gets built here. Assess where AI is reshaping Montana industry by industry, and return specific workforce, investment, and infrastructure recommendations. Each one carries a baseline, a target, and a date.

FOUR WORKING GROUPS

- **Practical AI and Small Business.** Get working tools into the hands of Montana employers and the people who train them.
- **Government Use.** Faster permitting, better service delivery, and responsible use inside state agencies and county offices.
- **Infrastructure, Energy, and Minerals.** Load growth, water, ratepayer cost, siting, and a community benefit benchmark counties can negotiate against. No other state has put this inside its AI strategy.
- **Community and Local Capacity.** A toolkit local leaders can use when a project arrives in their county.

Each group is co-chaired and seats public members drawn from outside the task force. That is how eighteen appointees become sixty people doing the work.

THE TABLE

Seats span all eight regions of the state, from the Flathead to the Hi-Line to eastern Montana. Sectors covered include agriculture, energy and utilities, mining and minerals, healthcare, small business, higher education, tourism, labor, and state information technology.

Montana's eight tribal nations are sovereign governments, not a constituency. Seats come through government-to-government invitation, and a data sovereignty process precedes any work touching tribal data.

DELIVERABLES

- **Day 90** – Priority opportunities and the infrastructure benchmark, delivered to the Governor.
- **January** – First report lands as the legislature convenes.
- **Quarterly** – Public briefing. Working group progress on the record.
- **Annual** – Montana Benefit Scorecard: adoption, jobs, capital reaching Montana founders, what infrastructure was promised against what was delivered, and what it cost ratepayers.

THE WINDOW

The legislature convenes in January. An executive order signed in October puts the task force's first deliverable on the Governor's desk that same month, early enough to shape what gets introduced rather than react to it.

The infrastructure timeline is less forgiving. No data center in Montana has reached an Energy Services Agreement with NorthWestern, which means terms are still open. Counties are writing siting rules now. A benchmark delivered in January is a tool. The same benchmark delivered in June is commentary.