

Data Center Decommissioning Plan

● DATA CENTER DECOMMISSIONING



SIMS
LIFECYCLE
SERVICES

Data Center Decommissioning Plan

A practical plan for secure, controlled and value-focused execution.

Data center decommissioning is not simply an equipment-removal project. It is a coordinated business process that must connect operational planning, data security, logistics, financial recovery and defensible reporting.

From scope definition through final reporting, this guide turns a complex decommissioning project into a documented, auditable process.

This whitepaper provides a controlled, eight-stage framework for data center shutdowns,

What does success look like?

A successful decommissioning project starts with an agreed end state, a reconciled asset inventory and clear data-security requirements. It ends only when assets, shipments, exceptions and disposition outcomes are fully documented.

live-environment hardware refreshes and colocation cage cleanouts. It also identifies the decisions clients should make before vendors mobilize, the information vendors need to plan accurately and the evidence stakeholders should expect at completion.

What this guide helps you do

- Reduce operational surprises by defining scope, access and site constraints early.
- Protect data-bearing assets with approved sanitization, tracking and exception controls.
- Maintain inventory integrity from rack location through receiving and final disposition.
- Create options for redeployment, reuse, resale, parts recovery and responsible recycling.
- Give IT, security, privacy, finance and sustainability teams the reporting they need.

Contents

1. Why decommissioning projects become complex
2. The eight-stage controlled process
3. Planning inputs and stakeholder decisions
4. Reporting and evidence
5. Decommissioning checklist
6. Frequently asked questions

1. Why data center decommissioning becomes complex

Risk enters the project wherever ownership, sequence or evidence is unclear. A server may be ready to disconnect but still covered by a lease. A rack may be scheduled for removal while network cabling remains active. A shipment may leave the site with a clean manifest yet arrive with an unresolved serial-number discrepancy. The plan must connect these dependencies before work begins.

Risk area	Why it matters
Operational continuity	Live environments can require off-hours work, precise tagging and coordination with other contractors.
Data security	Each data-bearing device needs an approved method, serialized tracking and documented exception handling.
Inventory integrity	Asset identities, locations and parent-child relationships must remain connected throughout removal and processing.
Site logistics	Loading docks, freight elevators, staging space, floor protection, truck restrictions and security clearances can control the pace of work.
Financial outcome	Lease returns, redeployment, resale, parts recovery and recycling require different handling and reporting paths.
Stakeholder evidence	IT, security, privacy, finance, risk and sustainability teams may require different views of the same project record.

A single source of truth

The strongest control is not a single task. It is continuity of information: the same asset identity follows the equipment from the source inventory to physical removal, transport, receiving, data processing and final disposition.

2. The eight-stage controlled process (See Appendix A for details)

1. Define the scope

Agree what will be removed, what will remain and what the completed site should look like. Include rooms, racks, cabinets, IT equipment, storage media, cables, PDUs, ancillary assets, leased equipment, services and final site condition.

2. Build and reconcile the inventory

Create the expected asset record before removal. Capture manufacturer, model, serial number, asset tag, device name, equipment type, rack and grid location, condition, data-bearing status, lease or ownership status, intended disposition and parent-child relationships.

3. Survey the site

Confirm access points, loading-dock and freight-elevator requirements, staging and work areas, power and internet, floor protection, technician clearance, truck and parking restrictions, and conflicts with other contractors.

4. Establish data-security requirements

Identify data-bearing devices and select approved data destruction outcomes. Define on-site requirements, serialized media tracking, witnessed activity, certification, client protocols and the process for exceptions.

5. Decommission and remove equipment

Verify tags, disconnect and remove equipment, disassemble racks when in scope, remove cables, recover approved spares, prepare lease returns, capture inventory, pack assets securely and document staging.

6. Transport assets securely

Use packaging, loading and transport controls that reflect asset and data risk. Connect the shipment record created at the site with the inventory received at the processing facility.

7. Recover value and manage disposition

After data requirements are complete, evaluate eligible equipment for internal redeployment, refurbishment, whole-unit resale, parts recovery or responsible recycling. Establish disposition rules before processing to reduce avoidable decisions and holds.

8. Report the final outcome

Reconcile what was expected, removed, received and processed. Provide chain-of-custody records, shipment documents, data-destruction and recycling certificates, disposition status, resale or recovery records, exceptions and agreed sustainability information.

3. Planning inputs and stakeholder decisions

Decisions to make internally

- Name an on-site decision maker and project manager.
- Match the decommissioning inventory to the CMDB or other system of record.
- Identify leased equipment, software licenses, warranties, support contracts and hardware-maintenance agreements that require action.
- Set critical dates, project milestones and the check-in cadence.
- Approve data destruction methods and define who can resolve exceptions.
- Determine whether removed equipment will be redeployed, returned, sold, harvested for parts or recycled.

Information to provide to vendors

- Data center address, operating hours and building-security requirements.
- Project type: live refresh, cage cleanout, shutdown or another defined scope.
- Hardware list and physical locations, including additional cabling, e-waste and miscellaneous assets.
- Preferred start and end dates plus blackout periods or off-hours requirements.
- Handling protocol for data-bearing assets and applicable data destruction requirements.
- Inventory capture, reconciliation, chain-of-custody and reporting requirements.
- Packing, palletization, shipment documentation and transport expectations.

Questions to close during the site survey

Space and access	Where can crews work and stage assets? Which dock, elevator and egress routes are approved?
Security	What clearances, badging, escorts, screening or restricted-area controls apply?
Infrastructure	Is power and internet available in the work area? What cabling or power systems must remain active?
Coordination	Which other contractors will be present, and who resolves conflicts or project holds?
Final condition	Will racks, floor bolts, cables or blanking plates be addressed? What does “complete” mean for each room or cage?

4. Reporting and evidence

Final reporting should allow stakeholders to follow the project from source inventory through disposition, while seeing any differences and how they were resolved.

Evidence category	Potential records
Asset accountability	Reconciled inventory; manufacturer, model and serial number; asset tag; parent-child relationships; count matching and discrepancies.
Data security	Chain of custody; media tracking; data destruction results; Certificates of Data Destruction; exception history and how it was resolved.
Logistics	Shipment documentation; packing unit or pallet association; site release and Circular Center receipt.
Disposition and finance	Redeployed, returned, sold, parts harvested or recycled status; sales price and net recovery information of assets.
Sustainability	Carbon reporting and other agreed outcome information.

A note on data destruction

Data destruction should be done according to NIST SP 800-88 Rev. 2 guidelines. Document the approved method, verification, evidence and exception process for the media in scope. Signed Certificates of Data Destruction are typically provided as evidence of data destruction.

Turn the plan into a controlled outcome

The best decommissioning plan creates clarity before equipment moves. It gives every stakeholder a common definition of scope, every asset a traceable path and every exception an owner. That discipline helps protect data, reduce disruption and create more informed disposition decisions.

5. Data center decommissioning checklist

<p>Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ On-site decision maker named☐ Project manager assigned☐ Stakeholders and escalation path documented☐ Timeline and check-in cadence approved <p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Included and excluded assets/services defined☐ Final site condition documented☐ Lease returns and spares identified☐ Cable, rack and floor-work requirements confirmed <p>Inventory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ CMDB or source record reconciled☐ Serial and asset identifiers captured☐ Rack/grid locations recorded☐ Data-bearing and parent-child status identified <p>Site readiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Survey complete☐ Access, dock and elevator confirmed☐ Work and staging areas designated☐ Security, floor protection and truck constraints resolved	<p>Data security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Approved data destruction outcomes documented☐ On-site or witnessed requirements confirmed☐ Chain-of-custody and media tracking defined☐ Exception authority and process assigned <p>Execution and logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ agging and removal sequence approved☐ Packing and palletization requirements set☐ Shipment documentation defined☐ Receiving reconciliation process confirmed <p>Disposition and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ Redeployment, resale, parts and recycling rules approved☐ Required certificates identified☐ Financial and sustainability data requirements defined☐ Final reconciliation and exception closeout assigned
--	--

6. Frequently asked questions

What services may be included in data center decommissioning?

Services may include project planning, inventory capture and reconciliation, equipment disconnection and removal, rack and cable work, data sanitization or destruction, packing, transport, redeployment, remarketing, parts recovery, recycling and final reporting. The required combination depends on the approved scope and end state.

How should a company compare data center decommissioning vendors?

Define project requirements first, classify each capability by priority and ask vendors to provide evidence against the same requirements. Compare delivery approach, controls, reporting, assurance and project fit, not just the length of the service list.

What inventory information should a vendor capture?

Common fields include manufacturer, model, serial number, asset tag, equipment type, rack or grid location, condition, data-bearing status, ownership or lease status, intended disposition and parent-child relationships.

What data-security evidence should a vendor provide?

Depending on the project, evidence may include serialized chain-of-custody records, processing results, verification, Certificates of Data Destruction and an exception history.

Why should disposition capabilities be evaluated during vendor selection?

Disposition affects handling, reporting and potential recovery outcomes. Evaluating redeployment, resale, parts recovery and recycling capabilities helps ensure that approved pathways can be executed and documented.

Do all decommissioning projects need the same vendor capabilities?

No. A shutdown, live refresh and colocation cage cleanout can have different operational, facility, timing and reporting requirements. The checklist is designed to help identify what is required for the specific project.

About Sims Lifecycle Services (SLS)

In addition to on-site decommissioning and certified data destruction, SLS helps data centers repurpose, resell, and responsibly retire IT equipment - with zero data risk. We also provide third-party maintenance services for companies as they migrate infrastructure to the cloud.

[Learn more about our services at simslifecycle.com.](https://simslifecycle.com)

Appendix A

1. Define the scope

Establish what will be removed, what will remain and what the completed site should look like.

The scope should address:

- Facilities and rooms
- Racks and cabinets
- Servers, storage and networking equipment
- Storage media
- Cables and power distribution equipment
- Ancillary IT assets
- Leased equipment
- In-scope and out-of-scope services
- Final site condition

2. Build and reconcile the inventory

A reliable inventory establishes what is expected to leave the environment.

Useful information includes:

- Manufacturer and model
- Serial number
- Asset tag or RFID
- Device name
- Equipment type
- Rack and grid location
- Parent-child relationships
- Data-bearing status
- Equipment condition
- Lease or ownership status
- Intended disposition

The existing SLS inventory guide recommends capturing equipment identity, location, condition, data-bearing status and parent-child relationships before removal.

3. Survey the site

A site survey identifies operational and logistical constraints before work begins.

The survey should confirm:

- Access points
- Loading-dock availability
- Freight elevator requirements
- Staging areas
- Work-area security
- Internet and power availability
- Floor-protection requirements
- Technician-clearance requirements
- Restricted truck sizes
- Parking limitations
- Other contractors working on site

SLS's current planning guide includes these details as part of project preparation and site assessment.

4. Establish data-security requirements

Identify all data-bearing devices and define the approved sanitization or destruction method.

Requirements may include:

- On-site data erasure
- Physical media destruction
- Serialized media tracking
- Parent-child relationships
- Witnessed destruction
- Certificates of Data Destruction
- Exception handling
- Client-specific security protocols

The appropriate method should align with media type, reuse objectives, company policy and applicable requirements.

5. Decommission and remove equipment

Assets are identified, disconnected, removed and prepared for transport according to the approved work plan.

Depending on the project, activities may include:

- Tag verification
- Equipment removal
- Rack disassembly
- Cable removal
- Parts or spare recovery
- Lease-return preparation
- Inventory capture
- Packing and palletization
- Secure staging
- Shipment documentation

6. Transport assets securely

Equipment should be packaged, loaded and transported using documented controls appropriate to the asset and data risk.

Shipment records should connect the equipment removed from the site with the inventory received at the processing facility.

7. Recover value and manage disposition

After data requirements are completed, equipment can be evaluated for:

1. Internal redeployment
2. Refurbishment
3. Whole-unit resale
4. Parts recovery
5. Responsible recycling

Whole-unit reuse generally preserves more economic and resource value than immediate material recycling.

8. Report the final outcome

Final reporting should demonstrate what occurred from equipment removal through disposition.

Reports may include:

- Reconciled asset inventory
- Chain-of-custody records
- Shipment documentation
- Certificates of Data Destruction
- Certificates of Recycling
- Disposition status
- Resale and recovery records
- Exception history
- Sustainability information

SLS's existing decommissioning planning content highlights inventory matching, shipment documentation, data-destruction certificates, equipment disposition, sales information and parent-child tracking as potential reporting requirements.

Appendix B

Project-specific playbooks

Data center shutdown

The end state is a vacated, documented space. Scope typically needs to address building coordination and the physical condition of the room.

- Coordinate with building or facility management.
- Remove agreed equipment and cabling.
- Address racks and floor bolts as specified.
- Leave the space broom-swept or in the contractually defined condition.

Live environment – hardware refresh

The priority is controlled removal without disrupting assets that remain in service.

- Plan work windows, including off-hours activity when required.
- Use client-approved asset tags or another unambiguous identification method.
- Agree the disposition of rail kits, rack PDUs, cords and other components.
- Confirm whether blanking plates or other rack-restoration tasks are required.

Colocation cage cleanout

The project must align client requirements with colocation building rules and handback expectations.

- Coordinate access, dock use, escorts and space-vacate requirements.
- Remove approved equipment and cabling.
- Document the cage condition at completion.
- Resolve shared-infrastructure boundaries before work starts.