The Census of Governments begins in October of 2011 with the mailing of the Government Units Survey. This survey collects descriptive information on the basic characteristics of local governments in preparation for the 2012 Census of Governments. Data from this survey will also be used to produce the official count of local government units in the United States and to update and verify the mailing addresses of government units. In 2012, the Census Bureau will request data on the employment and finances of state and local governments.

Under Title 13, Section 161, the Census of Governments has been conducted for years ending in “2” and “7” since 1957. The Census of Governments provides the only source of comprehensive, uniform statistics on the economic activity of state and local governments, as it identifies the scope and nature of the Nation’s state and local government sector; provides authoritative benchmark figures of public finance and public employment; classifies local government organizations, powers, and activities; and measures federal, state, and local fiscal relationships. Following the activity of governments over time tells the story of the fiscal condition of federal, state, and local government thus helping policy makers make informed decisions.

Data from the Census of Governments are used by the Bureau of Economic Analysis as input to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Federal Reserve Board as input to the Flow of Funds account. State and local governments use the data to develop programs and budgets, assess financial conditions, and perform comparative analysis.

The first data from the Census of Governments is scheduled for release beginning in August 2012 providing the number and types of government units by state. More comprehensive data will follow. If you have questions or would like further information on the Census of Governments, please call 1-800-242-2184 or via e-mail at govs.cms.inquiry@census.gov. General information and data can also be obtained at http://www.census.gov/govs/