State and Local Government Statistics: A Progress Report from the U.S. Census Bureau

Presented at the
National Tax Association
101st Annual Conference on Taxation

November 21, 2008

Disclaimer: This report is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.
Introduction to Governments Division

- Main purposes of Governments Division programs:
  - Provide economic statistics about governments
  - Are the public counterpart to business, industry, and services economic data
  - Follow the activity of governments over time
- Virtually no confidentiality restrictions
- Response is voluntary
State and Local Government Statistics at a Crossroads

- 2007 report issued by the Committee on National Statistics (CNStat)
- Suggested recommendations for improving existing programs
- Initial response slow due to staff transitions
- Since August 2008, focus on using recommendations to leverage change/improvements within the Division
CNStat Report Themes

- Data Quality, Relevance, and Utility
- Timeliness
- Dissemination
CNStat Theme:
Data Quality, Relevance, and Utility

• Recommendation 3-1: Get feedback from users on suggested improvements to the detail and classification of data on state and local government finances and employment

• Progress Update:
  – Reaching out to data users through consultations and workshops
CNStat Theme: Data Quality, Relevance, and Utility

• Recommendations in Chapter 4: **Conduct research** on existing methods to see where efficiencies and improvements can be made (i.e. survey redesign, response, editing and imputation, data revisions)

• Progress Update:
  – Redesigning all aspects of the Quarterly Tax survey (including implementing a new sample in January)
  – Conducted cognitive research in different areas for the annual finance and employment surveys
  – Broad review of each program to assess editing and imputation techniques
CNStat Theme: Data Quality, Relevance, and Utility

• Recommendations in Chapter 4: **Conduct research** on existing methods to see where efficiencies and improvements can be made (i.e. survey redesign, response, editing and imputation, data revisions)

• Progress Update (continued):
  – Revised revision policy
  – Improved communication between methods staff and analysts will improve production efficiencies, thus freeing up time for more research
CNStat Theme: Timeliness

• Recommendation 5-1: Research the benefits/ costs of adopting earlier release procedures, i.e. releasing preliminary estimates or releasing estimates as they are compiled

• Progress Update:
  – Successful in moving up the release of several products
  – Some constraints due to data processing and the use of statistical methods; are reviewing existing processes and methods to determine where efficiencies can be made
CNStat Theme: Dissemination

- Recommendations 4-1, 4-3, 4-8: Provide users with needed tools and documentation to accurately navigate existing methodologies
- Recommendation 5-2: Redesign and continually improve the Governments website
- Progress Update:
  - Working to position existing areas to focus specifically on user outreach and education
  - Produced an in-house dissemination tool, Build-A-Table
  - Exploring three mechanisms for dissemination: expansion of Build-A-Table, DataFerrett (including hot reports), and the new American FactFinder to debut in 2011
  - Implementing standards that are consistent in the Census Bureau
Build-A-Table

U.S. Census Bureau
Public Employment and Payroll Build-a-Table

Please select the variables you would like to display.

Select category
Select variables
Retrieve data
Recommendation 5-3: Facilitate *wider dissemination* of products by issuing press releases; add value to existing data by providing simple derived measures

**Progress Update:**
- Regular press releases began in October 2008 with the release of 2007 Census of Employment data
- Partnering with external users and beginning conversations on how best to approach the potential release of this information
State and local governments are flourishing

By Lee Davidson
Deseret News

Published: Thursday, Oct. 23, 2008 12:05 a.m. MDT

Over five years, this type of Utah business added nearly 7 percent more employees. The why was: The business services sector is booming.

Well, those numbers show Utah has more than one type of government, according to a new study from the Census Bureau. State and local government employment in Utah over the past five years grew about 1.7 percent.

Virginia tops list of federal spending per capita

Washington Business Journal - by Barton Ecker Contributing Writer

Thursday, October 2, 2008

The Census Bureau says domestic federal spending rose in fiscal year 2007 to $2.56 trillion -- up 4.4 percent from 2006.
## Data Release Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release Date</th>
<th>Release</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>2007 Census of Employment</td>
<td>Quinquennial</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Annual State Government Finances</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>2007 Census of Retirement</td>
<td>Quinquennial</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>Quarterly Tax</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>(Mar., Jun., Sept.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>Annual State Tax Collections</td>
<td>Annual</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>2007 Census of Finance</td>
<td>Quinquennial</td>
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Final Thoughts

• Working toward addressing the majority of recommendations by the 2012 Census of Governments

• Have some immediate challenges to overcome

• To be successful we need
  – Your patience and support;
  – Your input as we propose and recommend suggestions; and
  – Your assistance both in terms of input but also in helping to keep our response rates high
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