

To: Members of the Public Participation Committee

From: Emilia Govan

Attached for your information and comments is a report which I have distributed to OTA Program Managers summarizing the 'lessons learned' from the Oceans' public participation pilot effort. I hope to take this up at one of our committee meetings in May. Please let me have any written comments you may want to share with the committee before May 1.

As mentioned at our meeting on April 13, the next meeting of the committee will be held on Wednesday April 27 at 3 P.M. (There will be no meeting on April 20.) The agenda for April 27 will consist entirely of a discussion of 'workshops' or other public meetings that are appropriate to an OTA public participation effort. Please review for that purpose the materials I circulated two weeks ago (workshop invitation letters) and Barry Barrington's memo on workshops. Enclosed is a copy of a report "At Square One" which may give you some useful background information on public participation as viewed by federal staffers who carry out such programs.

In thinking about and in discussing the objectives and mechanics of workshops in general, and the automobile assessment activities in particular, please keep in mind the committee's suggestions of April 13. They are:

- o To hold an initial workshop for the automobile assessment in Washington during the next month or two to which a balanced and diverse mix of interested parties would be invited.
- o In connection with that workshop, to send out materials consisting of 'issues' working papers developed by the automobile assessment staff and panel.
- o Utilizing information generated at that workshop as a base to develop a brochure that would be distributed widely and that would, in turn, provide the base for other activities, perhaps initiated and carried out by the interested organizations themselves. These activities would hopefully generate additional inputs into the assessment.
- o To conduct a series of workshops (perhaps four or five) at key points in the assessment process (impact identification, option development, alternatives evaluation, etc.). These workshops would be held at carefully selected locations around the nation, chosen with a view toward including communities with different transportation needs.

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April 13, 1977

MEMORANDUM

TO: OTA Program Managers

FROM: Emilia L. Govan, Chairperson, Public Participation Committee *ely*

RE: Public Participation Program of Coastal Effects Assessment

The Oceans Program's Coastal Effects report which was recently completed contained the results of OTA's first venture into public participation as part of a major assessment. Since the release of that report, the Oceans staff reviewed and evaluated the conduct and results of the project. I would like to share that learning experience with you in this report so that you may determine how the Oceans Program efforts might be used, adapted, improved upon (or ignored) in other OTA projects.

The public participation element of the Coastal Effects assessment was an effort to bring about a direct exchange of information between OTA and citizens in the study region. The two-way flow of information was intended to contribute to the public's understanding of the technologies being assessed and to obtain information from the public about impacts and issues that were of priority interest and concern to them. The data obtained from the public participation project contributed to the effort to insure that factors which citizens considered relevant and important were adequately addressed in the study. The project also helped to provide Congress with a preview of the issues that may be significant in the legislative consideration of policy options.

Here are some of the general "lessons learned" in the course of putting together that preview:

1. Public participation goes beyond a fixed schedule of activities. It is a flexible, dynamic process that involves continuous informal contact beyond workshops or questionnaires. This contact is initiated both by the public -- in which case, it is important that the persons conducting the program be accessible and responsive -- and by the staff, in order to obtain or convey information.

2. There is no substitute for going to the field and talking to people directly in order to obtain a broad range of perceptions and understanding of the concerns. Throughout these activities it is important that citizens know they are dealing directly with staff persons who can be responsive to their input and will consider it in the final report. This contact should occur as early as feasible within the assessment process in order to sensitize the staff and major contractors and consultants to issues which the public views as important.
3. Citizens who have in the past participated, or attempted to participate, in the decision-making process at various levels of government are the real "experts" in public participation. They are a valuable resource and should be consulted early in the process for advice and guidance. At the national level, they have insight into the decision-making process and are familiar with citizen efforts to become involved in the subject being studied. At the local level, they can help identify interested individuals, help plan meetings and interviews, and provide information about experiences of citizens who have attempted to participate in governmental activities.
4. One of the most difficult challenges is to involve a "balanced" and defensible mix of participants. Highly organized special interest groups may be easy to identify and are generally eager to provide information about their concerns. However, if information is to be as representative as possible of all points of view, the opinions of even the least visible groups should be included. Community groups composed entirely of volunteers, unassociated individuals, and other interested parties with no formal organization will have to be sought out, and their views specifically solicited. This process is often difficult and time-consuming, and some citizens or interest groups may not respond even to repeated efforts to include them in workshops or other activities designed to solicit their input. The effort is necessary, however, to insure that potentially affected parties are made aware of their stakes and at least given the opportunity to participate.
5. Providing adequate objective information about the right items at the right time is a continuing problem. These factors are particularly important:
 - a) Early in the project the public needs data on the role and function of OTA in order to give them a frame of reference and a direction for their input.

- b) Similarly, data on the subject being studied and how the study will be conducted is necessary so that participants can focus their information on the particular needs of the study. This makes it easier for them to participate and prevents the frustrations that arise if citizens have to be told that the information they are presenting is "interesting but not relevant to the scope and nature of the study."
- c) Participants also need to know why their participation is being sought and how it will be used so that they can determine to what extent their input will be given serious consideration, what hope they have of influencing the study, and whether it is worthwhile for them to take their time to participate.
- d) Basic informational material about the technologies being studied is also necessary so that participants have a core of common information available for use. However, distribution of materials has several problems that are deserving of serious consideration:

--It is difficult to achieve a satisfactory balance between the public need and desire for information and the responsibility of the assessment team to distribute only data which have been verified. Large scale distribution of materials before editing, revision and integration involves expense and staff time and risks the dissemination and use of information which may be inaccurate or misleading.

--It is difficult to determine what type of information to give participants who are being asked to identify anticipated impacts and issues. If information on potential impacts is omitted, the data may be misleading. On the other hand, any information that suggests possible impacts might influence citizens to answer in directions that are not really indicative of their own thinking.

- 6. The most productive gatherings of participants appeared to be the give-and-take workshops which avoided the extreme of the public hearing process where citizens make position statements but are not permitted to ask questions, and the opposite extreme in which citizens take a formal adversary role, using interrogatories and cross-examination of witnesses.

7. Follow-up interviews with key participants were also very useful. Questionnaires should be constructed so as to expand the types of information received rather than limit public response to specific areas. Questions which limit responses to a specified number of short answers can be categorized and used to determine patterns. However, open-ended questions, while more difficult to analyze and categorize, can reveal the reasoning behind choices, the complexities citizens see, and alternative possibilities which the study may not be addressing adequately. Appropriate questions designed to seek names of additional potential participants can also be included in questionnaires.

There remain several questions, brought to our attention partly by outside reviewers, which were not resolved during our experience with public participation in the Coastal Effects assessment. These include:

- A. Is it necessary to reach a "random" sample of citizens for the purpose of OTA assessment? Although the Technology Assessment Board specifically told us not to conduct a "public opinion poll" as such, there seems to be some concern that our participants were not a scientifically selected random sample. What is the most effective way to select participants so as to insure that all relevant segments of the population have been reached?
- B. Would information provided by citizens have any additional meaning if OTA requested that participants identify any interest groups with which they are affiliated, so as to make possible a correlation between views expressed and affiliation?
- C. Would it be beneficial to ask participants about the primary source of their information about the technologies being studied, so as to ascertain the type of information base which various participants have?

We have not yet answered these questions to our satisfaction. We raise them, because they are well worth thinking about before launching any additional public participation activities.

An explanation of our public participation project was included in Chapter V of the Coastal Effects report. In Chapter III, quotes from participants in the project were used to illustrate the variety of views toward the issues and options identified by OTA. We have distributed copies of the report to all of the more than 1,200 citizens who participated in the project. We have already received some evaluation from these participants and expect more.

I would be very grateful if you could take some time to give me your reactions to, and comments on, this memo and the public participation portions of the Coastal Effects report (particularly Chapters III and V).

I would be particularly interested in knowing:

1. What other information about public participation can we provide for your use?
2. How could we have conducted the project, not just differently, but better?
3. How effective, in your opinion, is the presentation and use of public participation data in the Coastal Effects report?

Your thoughts will be helpful to other program managers and to the Director in considering the use of public participation in future OTA assessments. Your comments will also be of great benefit to the Public Participation Committee in our efforts to assist you in whatever public participation activities you may wish to undertake. Thank you for taking the time to look over this memo. I look forward to hearing from you.