STAFF MEMO

December 9, 1980

TO: OTA Staff

FROM: John H. Gibbons

SUBJECT: Director's Response to Recommendations of the
           OTA Task Force on TA Methodology and Management

        Since so many OTA staff participated in the activities
of the Task Force over the last year, I want to share with you
my response to the various Task Force recommendations and what
we are doing to implement them.

        The involvement of staff at all levels and in every
program and support office has been essential to making this
effort a success. On behalf of the Task Force, I thank you
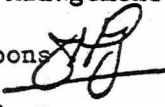for the many contributions made to this collective effort.

Attachment

OTA STAFF MEMO

December 3, 1980

TO: Members and Alternates of the OTA Task Force on TA Methodology
         and Management

FROM: Jack Gibbons

RE: Director's Response to Task Force Phase III
         Report and Recommendations

. I have now had an opportunity to provide a summary of the major Task
Force results to both TAAC and TAB. The Task Force Chairman assisted me in
making brief presentations to TAAC on October 3 and to TAB staff on
November 13. Comments received ranged from favorable to enthusiastic.

This feedback, along with the extensive and very productive discussions
held with Task Force members and Senior Management on September 25 and
October 2, has helped me prepare a more specific response (see attachment)
to the recommendations in your August 13 Phase III report. As you know,
many of the recommendations are already being implemented.

As I have said before, the work of the Task Force represents a major
contribution to better understanding and strengthening the OTA assessment
process. I am particularly pleased that our first major cross-program,
cross-divisional activity has fared so well. Your efforts were charitable,
effective, and of considerable lasting value to our Agency.

Overall, the Task Force-related activities are leading to what I know
will be very constructive, internal improvements at OTA. This kind of
participatory management enables OTA to more effectively tap its internal
wisdom about OTA-wide issues; it also helps to build an essential sense of
community within the office.

Attachment

Distribution List:
       (attached)

Director's Response to Task Force Phase III Report and Recommendations

R-1. Prepare a looseleaf TA workbook.

I concur with the strong consensus expressed by TAAC, Senior Management, and the Task Force on the need for a workbook covering the major steps of the OTA assessment process, such as rationale for, and use of, advisory panels, contracting, and internal and external review of draft reports. The workbook will be a useful vehicle for consolidating and sharing our learning from past assessment experience.

I am therefore asking the Task Force Chairman to establish a small working group to prepare a first draft. The working group will include some of our more experienced staff who have been through the entire assessment process several times. I encourage those Task Force members and others who are interested to contact the Task Force Chairman.

I expect that the working group will build directly on the earlier work of the Task Force, including the Phase I documents, and that the workbook draft will have the benefit of review and input from Senior Management as well as Task Force members.

R-2. Institute project close-out reports.

As a means of capturing new assessment experience, project close-out reports make sense. I am asking that Dave Banta, Audrey Buyrn, and Dick Rowberg act as a committee of three to prepare a first draft of a project close-out report format. The report format will be designed so that lessons learned from newly completed assessments can be folded into the TA workbook on a continual basis.

R-3. Develop and implement an orientation program.

We are already moving ahead to develop the first orientation program at OTA. This will help the newer staff and many contractors and consultants gain an earlier and more complete understanding of the OTA assessment process, and will help them move faster up the learning curve. The orientation package will include both tape and written materials, as well as face-to-face briefings and small group discussions. We have just completed a "display" about OTA which will be used for various briefings and to help orient OTA visitors, panel members, and others.

I have assigned lead responsibility for the orientation program to the Operations Manager. He will continue to call on members of the Task Force and Senior Management for your ideas and participation.

R-4. <u>Encourage internal exchange of learning on assessment strategy and
     policy analysis.</u>

I hope that the TA workbook and at least some of the "Brown Bag"
seminars will help meet this very important need. Also, my intent is that
assessment strategy and policy analysis be given greater attention both at
the beginning of each study (e.g., as part of the project proposal) and at
appropriate project review checkpoints (see R-6c). Finally, I would like to
plan to have at least one informal staff seminar each year on these
subjects.

With respect to assessment strategy, we initiated in September a modest
survey of TA (or its private sector analogies such as venture or market
analysis) methodology and strategy employed by selected private firms and
foreign countries. We also have arranged for several retrospective
methodology reviews of selected completed OTA studies. The intent is to
learn from the experience and perspective of others, and to make a
contribution to the broader TA professional community. The results of this
effort might well form the basis for a seminar early in 1981.

R-5. <u>Devote additional resources to congressional relations.</u>

The Task Force and Senior Management agreed that first priority here
should be placed on strengthening our internal mechanisms for sharing
collective learning about the legislative process, committee needs, and
congressional perspectives and priorities. I concur. The Brown Bag seminar
by Phil Yeager was a big help to many of us in this regard.   —

As a next step, I am asking the Director of Congressional and
Institutional Relations to organize an internal staff workshop to help bring
our learning to date into focus with respect to the new Congress. It is
gratifying that the CIR office, formed less than a year ago, has already
added so much to our ability to work effectively with our many constituents
in the Congress. Also, I expect that at least some dimensions of
congressional relations will be included in the TA workbook, particularly
those which are important to assessment methodology and management.

R-6a. <u>Clarify OTA proposal preparation policy.</u>

A draft set of guidelines for initiating planning and new project
proposals is presently being reviewed by OTA Senior Management. I will
circulate the draft for further review and comment in the near future and
expect the final revision to be included in the TA workbook. One feature of
the new procedure will be a cross-divisional review process for proposed new
work so that our <u>collective</u> resources and priorities can be tapped at a very
early stage.

R-6b. <u>Clarify report review and approval policy.</u>

Although some suggested a parallel review process, the general
consensus of the Task Force and Senior Management was to stick with a

sequential review process. I agree, with exceptions provided, of course, for unusual circumstances. It is very useful to me to have the comments of the Assistant Directors and Senior Editor, as well as a summary of advisory panel comments, when I consider a final draft report. A restatement of guidelines for report review will be included in the TA workbook. (Guidelines for editorial quality control and a complete discussion of the publications process are included in the OTA operations manual now in preparation. See R-10.)

R-6c. Establish project review checkpoints.

An important finding of the Task Force is the need for earlier and broader review of work in progress. I agree and am considering a series of project review checkpoints to move us in this direction. Of course the situation as it now exists (including the steps leading to TAB approval, advisory panel meetings, and internal seminars as projects near completion) is already providing a review process that exceeds that of most other agencies.

The checkpoints will help encourage cross-program and cross-divisional review of projects at key points in the process, for example, at the point where research is complete and a report outline has been developed, but before the actual drafting of a report has begun. Other likely checkpoints would be at the project proposal (pre-TAB), project plan (post-TAB), first working draft report, and final draft report stages. I expect that this will result in a significant saving in time, since we should be able to identify problems and provide guidance or assistance far earlier than in the past. As pointed out by the Task Force, the project teams prefer earlier feedback than has been the prior practice at OTA. By the time a report is in final draft, anything more than minor editing can be very time consuming and costly, as well as frustrating to all concerned.

I will circulate a draft set of checkpoints in the near future. In their final form, these checkpoints will be included in the TA workbook.

R-7. Allocate project follow-up time.

With respect to project follow-up, effective dissemination of study results is an essential part of the assessment process. The Task Force found that in the past, OTA has frequently given inadequate attention to effectively communicating study findings. Therefore, we have drafted a policy which establishes a 60- to 90-day follow-up period after report publication. During this time, key project staff will be encouraged to commit a portion of their effort to a variety of follow-up activities. These might include informal briefings for the requesting and interested committees, press briefings held jointly with committees, advising committees on possible witnesses and issues for hearings, the actual presentation of OTA testimony, preparation of articles based on the study results for publication in scientific journals, and attendance at scientific conferences for presentation of findings. These kinds of activities help derive maximum returns to the Congress on the investment in each project,

and also contribute to the professional development of OTA staff and the stature of OTA in the scientific and technical community.

Guidelines on project follow-up will be included in the OTA operations manual. (Follow-up will also be discussed in the TA workbook.)

R-8. <u>Revise "What Is OTA" pamphlet.</u>

I agree with the need to revise this pamphlet. However, I am deferring any action, other than minor changes for a limited edition of reprints for the new Congress, until after completion of the TA workbook.

R-9. <u>Prepare summary paper on Task Force work for OTA annual report.</u>

I am asking the Task Force Chairman to work with the Senior Editor in preparing a first draft for my review and comment, thence to be included in the annual report.

R-10. <u>Prepare administrative guidebooks and orientation.</u>

The Operations Division is now well along towards completing an OTA operations manual which, for the first time, will bring all of the major procedures and guidelines for contracting, publishing, information services, preparing project budgets, and the like under one cover. The manual will be looseleaf so that it can be updated easily. This will help us to strike a better balance between informality and flexibility on the one hand, and orderly process and necessary common procedures on the other.

The operations manual will include essentially everything suggested by the Task Force, and will be complemented by orientation sessions and informal consultation where requested.

The Operations Division has asked for comments on the draft manual from interested Task Force members.

R-11. <u>Require user participation in administrative decision-making process.</u>

I agree with the importance of early involvement for users and those who will be affected, before final decisions are made. I am asking the Operations Division to implement this recommendation in all appropriate areas, as is already being done in developing the orientation program and operations manual.

R-12. <u>Establish information systems task force.</u>

I will soon form a new, small task force to identify and develop ways in which we can improve our utilization of office information systems. As recommended, this group will provide a resource to identify OTA information needs, present and potential, and the range of systems appropriate to our needs, taking into consideration cost, compatibility, emerging technology,

flexibility, noise, and other factors.

The task force will review OTA's current use of information handling equipment, including word processors, computers, electronic typewriting and typesetting equipment, and telephones, and determine how to improve our cost-effectiveness. This OTA effort will draw in part on related work already completed by the House Administration and Senate Rules and Administration Committees. The task force will also take a look at whether new services such as computer mail, video-conferencing, or electronic filing offer any potential benefits to OTA.

In the interest of having a broadly representative membership, I will ask that this task force include at least two people from each of the following categories: secretary, administrative assistant, program/project research staff, and division support staff. I will also ask that the Administrative Officer, Controller, Manager of Information Services, and Publishing Officer, or their designated representatives, serve on the task force, and that the Operations Manager and the Program Manager for Communication and Information Technologies serve as ex-officio members.

R-13. Overtime pay for secretaries.

I am deferring a specific decision on overtime pending further consideration of the several constraints and factors involved. However, I am taking immediate actions to deal with the underlying problems: (1) a salary review to ensure that secretarial compensation is at competitive levels; (2) a review of our compensatory time off policy for use when secretarial overtime is necessary; (3) a review of the entire information flow process (by the information systems task force, which will include secretaries) to identify ways of improving cost-effectiveness, particularly with respect to drafting, typing, and publishing reports; and (4) a review of options for sharing work load and "temporaries" between programs/divisions.

R-14. Re-evaluate physical work environment.

In the last quarter of FY80, the Operations Division conducted an office-wide review of our physical work environment. As a result, several major adjustments were implemented in order to make more effective use of the space available to us. To improve productivity, priority was placed on co-locating program offices to the extent possible and providing a greater degree of quiet and privacy wherever feasible.

R-15. Compile an inventory of OTA staff/contractor expertise.

The Task Force identified a need for new ways to share staff expertise across project, program, and even divisional lines. I agree that one useful way to do this is through an inventory of current staff capabilities and interests. The inventory could be particularly useful to project directors and program managers when seeking expertise not immediately available on the project team.

The Operations Division is in the process of developing such an inventory, with an initial focus on OTA staff, in-house contractors, consultants, and panelists (including members of TAAC). This activity is one of the first assignments undertaken by our newly appointed Personnel Officer (Bill Norris) who began work a month ago.

R-16a. Reinstitute staff newsletter.

The new "Focus" (produced by the Information Center) is now serving as a staff newsletter as well as a library reference document.

R-16b. Reinstitute memo announcements of staff changes.

Staff changes are now included as brief news items in "Focus."

R-16c. Invite support office staff participation in project activities.

The "Brown Bag" seminar series, periodic listing of ongoing assessments, "Focus" newsletter, circulation of publication briefs and quarterly reports on overall OTA activities, and information kiosks and publication racks on each floor are intended to help all staff to keep abreast of OTA activities. I would welcome any additional suggestions from you.

R-17. Allocate percentage of staff time to professional development.

To perform its mission, OTA needs the best quality staff available—both professional and support. Maintaining this quality in any organization requires some reasonable level of ongoing staff development. However, I agree with the general consensus of the Task Force and Senior Management that setting a specific percentage of time is neither appropriate nor necessary. I am encouraging assistant directors and program managers, as well as the Personnel Office, to look for staff development opportunities which will enhance the quality of individual staff members, and ultimately the quality and cost-effectiveness of OTA work. Also, implementation of a number of other Task Force recommendations, especially R-1, R-3, R-4, R-5, R-6c, and R-7, will clearly contribute to this end.