REPORT ON

TASK FORCE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

August 13, 1980

Prepared by the OTA Task Force on
TA Methodology and Management

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Preface

To the OTA Director:

On behalf of the OTA Task Force on TA Methodology and Management, I am pleased to submit to you our report on Task Force findings and recommendations. The recommendations represent the consensus views of the Task Force, and are based on extensive discussion with and feedback from a wide cross-section of OTA staff.

Our seventeen recommendations have been grouped into three clusters: assessment process, management support, and staff involvement. In each case, we have suggested both a lead responsibility and time frame for implementation.

The Task Force itself is proposed for a lead role in only two of the seventeen recommendations, with a supporting role in three others. Our intent is to focus the remaining Task Force effort on those tasks for which we are uniquely qualified and which build most directly on our work to date. We expect to complete the business of this Task Force by January 1981, the beginning of the 97th Congress.

Overall, we believe that the task force approach of involving a wide cross-section of OTA staff is proving to be very worthwhile and may be useful in other areas of OTA activity.

With thanks for your continuing support,

Respectfully submitted,

Fred B. Wood

Fred B. Wood
Task Force Chairman

Contents

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 30, 1979, the OTA Director announced the formation of an OTA Task Force on TA Methodology and Management.* Each of the nine OTA programs designated a representative to the Task Force. Seven programs designated both a member and an alternate. The OTA Director, Deputy Director, and Operations Manager serve as ex-officio members.

The Task Force held its first official meeting in January 1980, and on February 12 adopted a plan of action which included the following seven phases:

I. Survey and description of OTA assessment process.

IIA. Brief survey of non-OTA experience.

IIB. Self-evaluation of OTA assessment process.

III. Develop suggestions and recommendations.

IV. Preparation of looseleaf TA handbook for internal staff use.

V. (Optional) Preparation of summary paper for OTA Annual Report.

VI. (Optional) Preparation of summary handbook or pamphlet for general distribution.

Over the last six months, the Task Force met eleven times and devoted most of its attention to the survey and self-evaluation of the OTA assessment process (Phases I and IIB). and to developing suggestions and recommendations for improvement (Phase III).

The Task Force wishes to acknowledge the large number of OTA staff who provided useful inputs to the survey and feedback and comment on the results. All of the nine programs, seven support offices, and the secretarial/AA group participated in some way in the work of the Task Force.

The findings and recommendations presented below represent the Task Force consensus.

*See Attachment A, Director's Memo establishing the Task Force.

II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Assessment Process

Findings

A detailed description of the OTA assessment process is difficult, since so many aspects depend on project and subject-specific variables and because we are still learning. However, on a more general level, there is a widely agreed upon series of steps or phases through which most OTA assessments proceed. The more senior (in tenure) OTA staff have learned these steps through experience. But for the newer staff and many contractors, consultants, and panelists, a more complete picture of the process is both welcome and helpful.

The OTA assessment process has a number of conflicts built into it. There is never a single right way to resolve such conflicts, and the process of carrying out a high-quality and useful assessment can be understood in part as dealing creatively with the tension between conflicting goals. Examples of such tensions include: (1) the need to approach problems with an innovative, responsive, flexible assessment process, balanced against the need for an accountable, documented, credible, and replicable process; (2) the mandate to assess technologies, which requires understanding the technology in depth, balanced against the Congressional requirement for assessments whose relevance to current problems and policy issues is clear; (3) the desire to produce an assessment which covers all the major aspects of its subject in depth, with all the key findings checked and documented (which many Advisory Panels will urge), balanced against the desire to get the assessment out quickly (which every requesting Committee will urge); (4) the need to strike an appropriate balance between full-scale assessments lasting a year or more (which in effect build OTA's intellectual capital) and short-term responses to Congressional needs (which in effect make use of the capital).

Largely because of these tensions and the inherently complex nature of TA, there are many fuzzy or gray areas in the conduct of an OTA assessment which defy the easy development or use of standardized, formalized rules of procedure. Yet, while the OTA process is complex and still evolving, we have in fact accumulated substantial experience to date. There is a need for new mechanisms to share this experience more widely.

The Phase I survey identified the policy analysis component of assessment strategy as one of the most crucial elements of many studies, yet one where OTA can do much better. For example, "One of the weaknesses of some OTA assessments is that while the review of technical questions has been excellent, the policy sections have offered little more than broad indications of what steps might be taken to promote or regulate technologies." (p. 5, Phase I document). "Many of our studies have too many options and too little analysis of the consequences of the options." (p. 7). "Experience has shown that the job of bridging the gap between a statement of policy options and a viable means of examining the related issues and impacts is probably one of the most difficult parts of an assessment." (p. 24)

Thus at the level of assessment strategy, the identification and analysis of policy options and consequences is an area where staff would appreciate opportunities for learning. This aspect of TA is particularly important for OTA and deserves more focused attention. It is here--at the level of assessment strategy--that the need for innovation and vision is perhaps felt most strongly.

The quality and productivity of the OTA assessment process is a function of many factors--some are purely methodological, others relate to project management, and several involve larger considerations of OTA-wide organizational development and leadership. The reality is that just about every aspect of OTA operations touches the assessment process in one way or another.

The importance of effective relations with our primary client--the U.S. Congress and its members, committees, and staffs--is widely recognized. This priority is reflected in the establishment and mission of OTA's Office of Congressional and Institutional Relations (CIR). The Task Force survey identified the need to allocate additional resources and devote additional attention to implementing improved Congressional relations at all appropriate stages of the assessment process.

With respect to review of assessment reports, the Task Force survey identified several problems. First, project schedules frequently fail to allow sufficient time for review and revision. Second, the review process begins too late in the life of the study. Third, partially as a result of one and two, the internal review can easily become protracted and bogged down. Thus there is a need for improvements in the report review and approval process.

With respect to project follow-up, effective dissemination of study results is an essential part of the assessment process. The Task Force found that all too often the publication of a report has meant the end of the study, rather than the beginning of an intensive effort to effectively communicate its findings.

Recommendations

R-1. Prepare a looseleaf TA handbook or workbook for internal staff use.

The original Task Force plan included the preparation of a looseleaf handbook or workbook for internal staff use (Phase IV). The idea was that the workbook would have a section for detailed treatment of each major aspect or phase of the OTA assessment process. Sections would be updated periodically.

Based on the results of work to date, the Task Force is convinced that preparation of such a document is desirable at this time. However, to be useful and feasible, we believe that the workbook should focus on the major steps in conducting an assessment rather than on specific analytical techniques, and that the workbook should be as concise as possible (with a target length of not more than 50 pages). The Phase I survey document to some extent served the original intent of the handbook. But Phase I also highlighted the need for additional effort to pull together our collective learning.

We believe that preparation of a workbook would be complemented by the other mechanisms (recommended below) for sharing assessment experience. If these mechanisms work well, a workbook could be updated on a regular basis with relatively little additional effort.

The Task Force believes that the workbook would build directly on the Phase I and Phase IIA working papers, and that preparation of such a workbook should be top priority on the Task Force agenda for the rest of the calendar year.

Completion of the workbook would essentially mark the conclusion of the Task Force effort. The workbook would be designed for ease of future updating. This continuing responsibility would be that of the OTA Director or his designate, not the Task Force.

Implementation responsibility: Task Force with assistance from Sr. Editor and Publishing Officer; broad input from OTA staff; review by Sr. Management; approval by OTA Director.

Time frame: September-December 1980

R-2. Institute—on an experimental basis—project close-out reports at the completion of each assessment.

These reports would be filed by the project director within two months after project completion and would summarize lessons learned, methods that worked and those that didn't, experience with contractors, and other pertinent observation. In essence, each report would be a retrospective summary of key learning. A brief, supplementary report could be filed 4-6 months later to summarize who used the report and how, press coverage, follow-up requests, and the like. The reports should be filed in the Information Center or some other central location for the benefit of new project directors and as an on-going contribution to OTA's institutional learning. Also, the reports would be valuable contributions to the staff workbook.

Implemention responsibility: OTA Director; Task Force to provide the Director with a list of suggested items to be included in the close-out reports.

Time frame: Begin in September 1980 on an experimental basis for a one-year period.

R-3. Develop and implement an orientation program for new OTA staff and for other staff as appropriate.

OTA provides an orientation program for its Congressional Fellows, but none for incoming staff. The Task Force believes that a well-planned, but brief, orientation program would both enhance the effectiveness of new staff and make them feel more at home at OTA. The orientation program should be planned with the needs of incoming professional and support staff primarily in mind, but it should also be of real value to in-house contractors who are expected to remain for the duration of an assessment, and to staff who have been around for a while and want to catch up with what the rest of OTA is doing.

We believe that the keys to the effectiveness of such an orientation program are that it be carefully planned in advance, that it be kept brief (perhaps a maximum of two working days), and that it be repeated frequently so that arriving staff seldom have to wait long for the next orientation "course."

It would probably be appropriate for a new task force under the direction of the Operations Manager to plan such an orientation program. We suggest that such a program include: (1) An introduction to OTA's internal structure, with a chance to meet briefly with the senior management; (2) A review of the kinds of work OTA is doing, but avoiding the kind of mind-numbing briefing which devotes five minutes to each current project; (3) An introduction to what a technology assessment is, and the main aspects of how OTA does them; (4) An introduction to how Congress works, and where OTA fits in; and (5) A survey of the resources available to OTA staff. Where appropriate the orientation program could make use of videotape and other innovative methods of presentation.

Implementation responsibility: New task force under direction of Operations Manager with participation of program/project staff, operating under very broad guidance from the Director. Once the program is planned, Personnel should arrange the "courses", with appropriate OTA staff making presentations.

Time frame: October-December 1980; continuous thereafter.

R-4. Encourage internal exchange of OTA learning on assessment strategy with particular attention to policy options, impacts, and issues.

Part of the policy analysis problem is a commonly perceived lack of appropriate or acceptable methodology. (This problem was also identified in the Phase IIA survey of non-OTA experience.) As a result, a seat-of-the-pants approach is generally used for dealing with policy options, impacts, and issues. OTA staff need to learn which policy approaches have been most useful in our studies, which have worked well when used by others, and which promising approaches have not been used at all and should be tried. The Task Force believes that exchange of such learning should be encouraged.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

R-5. Devote additional resources to improving Congressional relations at all appropriate stages of the assessment process.

The Task Force strongly endorses the role of the Director, Congressional and Institutional Relations, in helping project and program staff to do a more consistently good job in:

- identifying and meeting committee needs.
- scoping project proposals so that they more effectively relate to a broader range of committee perspectives.
- looking for opportunities for interim responses--short-term responses tied to larger, longer-term project.
- tracking on an ongoing basis Hill activities, e.g., hearings, legislation, investigations, that bear on current (and already completed) OTA studies.
- matching Hill needs and OTA expertise.
- maintaining effective relations with client committees during the study period.
- finding additional, innovative ways for Congress to make use of completed studies.

The Task Force believes that many programs would find it profitable to devote additional attention and resources to improving Congressional relations, in coordination with the Director, CIR.

Implementation responsibility: Director, CIR, and Program Managers, with assistance from project/program staff and other offices as appropriate.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

R-6. Clarify OTA policy on certain key aspects of the assessment process: proposal preparation, review and approval of reports, ongoing project review.

While the Task Force in general favors a flexible assessment process, there are some currently ill-defined aspects which result in much wasted time and effort. Three areas require attention:

a. Clarify proposal preparation policy. The Task Force recommends that the OTA Director set forth explicit guidelines for proposal preparation, such as the following:

   - requirement for an early meeting between the OTA Director, relevant Sr. Management, the proposed project director, and other relevant staff.
   - guidelines for budgeting, staffing, and scheduling.

- o guidelines for content of proposals, including specific sections on committee interests and policy issues.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Sr. Management.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

b. Clarify report review and approval policy. The Task Force believes that quality control is an essential element of the OTA process, and that all reports should go through intensive internal and external review prior to submission for TAB approval.

The Task Force recommends that more realistic time estimates be built into the review schedule at the outset, and that we begin the review process far earlier than is presently the case--perhaps even at the outline stage. By the time a report is in final draft, anything more than minor editing can be very time-consuming as well as demoralizing and frustrating to all concerned.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director, Sr. Editor, and Sr. Management with participation of project/program staff.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

c. Establish project review checkpoints. We recommend that several checkpoints for project review be designated and that cross-program/divisional participation be encouraged. Most projects can benefit from other perspectives and inputs, and the earlier the better.

Suggested checkpoints include: project proposal (pre-TAB approval), project plan (post-TAB), research results/report outline, first working draft report, final draft report.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Sr. Management with participation of project/program staff.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

ross-program/
ross-divisional
Seminar reviews
Coordination?

R-7. Allocate adequate time and resources for project follow-up on major assessments.

The completion of a report should mark the beginning of project follow-up to communicate key findings to both the requesting committee(s) and other committees that might have an interest or jurisdiction in the topic. This might include such activities as informal committee briefings, press conferences held jointly with committees, press briefings, advising committees on possible witnesses and issues for hearings, and of course the actual presentation of OTA testimony. We believe that staff should also be encouraged to prepare articles based on the study results for publication in scientific and popular journals and magazines, and to attend scientific forums and conferences for presentation of findings.

The Task Force recommends that adequate time and resources be allocated to project follow-up. We suggest up to 2-3 person months total equivalent staff time for principal analysts on major projects.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Sr. Management.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

R-8. Revise the "What Is OTA" (tan) pamphlet to include a brief description which outlines--in narrative and flow chart form--the major steps through which most OTA assessments proceed.

Preparation of a pamphlet on the assessment process was included as Phase VI of the Task Force plan. We propose that the existing tan pamphlet (OTA; What It Is, What It Does, How It Works) be revised to include a more detailed description of the OTA assessment process based on the material to be developed for the staff workbook.

Implementation responsibility: Sr. Editor and Publishing Officer with assistance from the Task Force; review by Sr. Management; approval by OTA Director.

Time frame: December 1980-January 1981.

R-9. Prepare summary paper on Task Force results for use in 1980 OTA Annual Report.

Phase V of the Task Force plan is the preparation of a paper for use in the next annual report. The Technology Assessment Act (P.L. 92-484) establishing OTA calls (in Sec. 11) for an annual evaluation of assessment techniques. We expect that the results of the Task Force work will justify such a paper, and therefore recommend that, as planned, the annual report include a summary of Task Force activities and findings.

Implementation responsibility: Task Force with assistance from Sr. Editor and Publishing Officer; final approval by OTA Director.

Time frame: December 1980-January 1981.

B. Management Support

Findings

From the project management perspective, there is a need to strike a better balance between, on the one hand, the informality and flexibility which seems desirable and possible for an organization this small, and, on the other hand, the sense of orderly process and understanding of necessary common procedures which keep things flowing smoothly with a minimum of difficulty. Some areas like information services (provided by the Information Center) are doing an excellent job of outreach and service to projects and programs. In other areas such as budgeting, personnel, and publications, OTA can benefit by having more of the process better understood and written down. In still other areas, like contracting and administrative services, the documents in existence could serve well if updated and revised with the user in mind, and supplemented by orientation and informal briefings as used so effectively by the Information Center.

Both program/project staffs and support office staffs are crucial to the success of OTA studies. Every office has a key role at one or more steps in the process. It is in OTA's interest to improve these working relationships as much as possible. We recognize that some tension is inevitable when it comes to allocation of scarce resources (e.g., dollars, people, space, time). And some internal checks and balances are necessary and healthy.

The Task Force did find considerable confusion and concern about a number of existing OTA administrative procedures. In some instances, the rationale for a specific procedure was either unclear or questionable. In other cases, procedures were changed without prior notice to or involvement of users.

With respect to new procedures, the Administrative Office and Financial Services Office are in the midst of developing, respectively, a management information system (MIS) and a planning, programming, budgeting system (PPBS) for OTA. The systems are in part a response to long-standing budget problems, changing reporting requirements established by public law and the Appropriations Committees, increased pressures for more cost-effective operations, and the general maturing of OTA to the point where more sophisticated management and financial systems are a necessity. There is fairly widespread concern that many of those who will be asked to help implement and use these systems are not being given a meaningful opportunity to participate in their development. This is particularly true for project directors and administrative assistants.

The Task Force also found that staff at all levels are concerned about the quality of the physical work environment. Excessive noise (which is aggravated by the influx of word processors), cigarette and tobacco smoke, and lack of privacy are the most frequently cited problems. Apparently a significant number of professionals now wear earplugs in their offices in order to concentrate, and a growing number resort to working at home at times of critical writing and synthesis.

The use of word processing was raised a number of times. Some staff feel OTA can productively make far better use of automated office equipment than is presently the case.

Recommendations

R-10. Improve information flow between program/project staff and support office staff through updated (or new) guidebooks, orientation sessions, and continued informal consultation.

While not everything can or should be written down, guidebooks to services provided by each of the support offices would be extremely helpful. Each guidebook should explain who does what in a given area, provide simple checklists of what needs to be done, and include the most important rules of thumb, common pitfalls, and helpful hints.

We suggest the following family of guidebooks, several of which already exist in some form:

- Guide to administrative services. Update and expand the December 1978 document (orange cover).
- Guide to contracting services. Update the April 23, 1979 document and include more illustrative material on contracting strategies that have worked well.
- Guide to financial services. This would be a new and very important document which, if done well and coupled with intensive staff orientation, could save much time and effort.
- Guide to information services. Update the August 1979 document (blue cover) as necessary.
- Guide to senior editing services. New, although could be based in part on memos now in existence.
- Guide to personnel services. New. This should include information on procedures for hiring, processing of benefit claims, obtaining temporary typing support, and the like.
- Guide to public communication services. New.
- Guide to publishing services. New, although could be based substantially on drafts now in existence.

These guidebooks would be for internal OTA staff use, and in most areas should be complemented by orientation sessions (such as conducted by the Information Center) and informal consultation on an as needed basis. Some or all of the guidebooks could be consolidated into an OTA operations manual.

Implementation responsibility: Operations Division with participation of project/program staff; review by Sr. Management; approval by OTA Director.

Time frame: July-October 1980.

R-11. <u>Require user participation in the review, development, and implementation of OTA administrative policies and procedures.</u>

The Task Force does not want to see any more red tape at OTA than is absolutely necessary. But in areas such as contractor invoicing, panel travel reimbursement, use of the conference center, correspondence control, and the like, uniform administrative policies and practices are essential to the smooth functioning of the organization. These and other existing procedures should be reviewed and updated with the full participation of the ultimate users.

With respect to new procedures such as the management information systems (MIS) and planning, programming, budgeting systems (PPBS) still being developed, the Task Force commends these efforts but strongly suggests that the users of such systems be directly involved in their development. This means that project directors and administrative assistants as well as program managers and assistant directors should participate. If the AA's (and project directors) are going to be asked to help implement and be held accountable by the MIS and PPBS at the project/program level, they deserve to have a meaningful input along the way.

Implementation responsibility: Operations Division with participation of project/program staff, and especially project directors and administrative assistants.

Time frame: July-October 1980.

R-12. <u>Establish a task force to evaluate OTA office information systems, broadly defined in the context of the "office of the future."</u>

Jack re: Info Center automation

Many OTA staff, and the secretaries and AAs in particular, are concerned about word processing problems. There was vigorous consensus among support staff that professionals need to be educated on what types of material should be typed on the word processor. A partial solution might be to encourage professionals who want to type first draft material themselves to request a typewriter.

Steve Doyle re: systems that would include Info Center operations

On a broader level, part of the problem may be that OTA is not taking full advantage of the latest developments in information technology. For example, commercially available systems now permit remote keyboarding and storage, a feature apparently not offered by Linolex. Also, the full potential of word processing systems as an integral part of the report publications process is not being effectively realized. Finally, many new office information systems are only one step away from the "office of the future" with ~~current awareness profiles~~, remote access to on-line data bases, and ~~the like~~.

Tom re: shores

Because OTA is an "information and paper shop," that is, the flow of ideas and paper and reports is our product, word processing and office information systems are central to OTA operations.

For all these reasons, the Task Force recommends that the Director establish a separate task force to evaluate OTA information system needs, present and potential, including relevant aspects of the "office of the future." The office information systems task force should identify the range of systems appropriate to OTA needs, taking into consideration cost, compatibility, flexibility, noise, and other factors.

Implementation responsibility: New task force chaired by the OTA Operations Manager with representation from the Administrative Office, Sr. Editor, Publishing Office, and a cross-section of project/program staff (including a strong contingent of secretaries, AAs, and editors, plus at least one person from the Telecommunication and Information Systems Program).

Time frame: October 1980-April 1981.

R-13. Provide overtime pay to OTA secretaries when evening and/or weekend work is unavoidable.

Part of the word processing problem is that during peak periods programs provide more material than secretaries can effectively handle. Temporary help is often unavailable or unsatisfactory, and very costly.

In general, OTA secretaries would like to earn overtime pay rather than compensatory time off. When the "crunch" comes, as it always does, OTA secretaries are able to do the extra work at less cost, have well established working relationships with professional staff, and do not have to learn the system.

The Task Force recommends that overtime pay for secretaries be established as OTA policy under the authority vested in the OTA Director by P.L. 92-484.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Operations Manager.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

R-14. Re-evaluate the physical work environment to reduce noise and air pollution and increase personal privacy.

The Task Force recommends a re-evaluation of the physical work environment and work space arrangements. The objectives should be to reduce noise from all sources (especially word processors and telephones), eliminate smoke from all sources (except in ventilated private offices and designated smoking areas), and increase personal privacy.

It is essential that project/program staff participate in this process. In the past, decisions about the physical work environment frequently have been made without the meaningful participation of project staff, who usually bear the brunt of any changes, for better or worse.

Implementation responsibility: Operations Manager and Administrative Officer with participation of project/program staff; review by Sr. Management; approval by OTA Director.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

C. Staff Involvement

Findings

At the project level, there is a perceived need for some kind of mechanism for sharing expertise. For example, the use of specific TA methods varies widely by subject matter and the particular nature of each project. Only the rare staff person has or can be expected to have first-hand knowledge of all TA methods. Yet most methods have been tried at one time or another on some OTA project. Thus there is a need for sharing and pooling our collective staff expertise. Several of the earlier recommendations will meet this need in part. Other mechanisms are suggested below.

On an OTA-wide level, the Task Force found that staff motivation is significantly affected by the extent to which staff really feel a part of the organization and know what is going on. Many staff expressed a strong desire for more regular information on the status of current assessment activities and prospects for the future, broader participation in defining OTA's future (e.g., with respect to internal priority setting), and a greater OTA-wide appreciation for the realities at the so-called working levels of the organization. OTA places heavy responsibilities and reliance on project directors and staff (both research and support). And many seek stronger linkages to and more meaningful participation in the decision processes which ultimately affect their ability to do a good job. This desire is reflected in many of the recommendations presented earlier.

Finally, the Task Force believes that OTA should establish some level of effort which is understood to be necessary and expected for staff involvement in professional development.

Recommendations

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

The Task Force recommends that the Personnel Office survey OTA staff to determine their experience in specific TA areas, as well as their current expertise and interests. A directory of staff experience could then be developed for use by project directors and program managers when seeking expertise not immediately available on the project team. An inventory of external contractors and perhaps panelists should also be developed. This should be cross-indexed by subject matter or field of expertise, and by name of the relevant project director.

yet
check re:
contractor/
consultant/
staff
info

Implementation responsibility: Personnel Office in consultation with the Administrative Office; Task Force to provide a list of suggested items to be included.

Time frame: August-September 1980.

R-16. Implement additional measures to improve intraoffice communication.

In the Phase I survey, many staff emphasized the need for better internal communications. Response to the "Brown Bag" seminar series has been enthusiastic. Circulation of publication briefs on recently completed reports has been well received. Wider in-house distribution of the OTA-wide and divisional quarterly reports is a useful, positive step. The Director's quarterly (or so) staff briefings on the general OTA outlook and results of TAB meetings are widely appreciated. The recently installed information kiosks and publication racks on each floor are welcome additions.

In order to further improve staff morale and productivity, the Task Force recommends the following additional measures:

a. Reinstitute a staff newsletter. The Task Force encourages continued development of the new "Focus" (produced by the Information Center) as a staff newsletter as well as a library reference document.

b. Reinstitute memo announcements from the Director on staff appointments and changes.

   Implementation responsibility: OTA Director

   Time frame: As soon as possible.

c. Invite support office staff participation in key project activities. There appear to be several advantages to improved support office understanding of the flavor and progress of studies, namely better appreciation of the needs of projects/programs and more fully informed decision-making than is presently possible. We suggest that support office staff be invited to attend selected panel meetings, project review sessions, and the like.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Sr. Management.

Time frame: As soon as possible.

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

OTA needs to more clearly recognize the value to itself and to the Congress of encouraging staff to maintain and further develop their professional credentials and status, in part through activities not necessarily related to specific projects. ingrained

The Task Force therefore recommends that a percentage of time--we suggest about 5%--be allocated to professional development (such as learning experiences, journal publications, and participation in conferences). This time would be separate from the project follow-up efforts recommended in R-7.

Implementation responsibility: OTA Director and Sr. Management

Time frame: October 1980; continuous thereafter.

III. ATTACHMENT

STAFF MEMO

November 30, 1979

TO: Deputy Director
Assistant Director
Program Managers
Project Directors
Administrative Officer
Personnel Officer
Liaison Office
Senior Editor

FROM: Jack Gibbons JHG

RE: Establishment of OTA Task Force on Technology Assessment Methodology and Management

I am pleased to announce the formation of a task force to identify and develop ways in which we can improve our methodology and management of technology assessment. The task force will provide a mechanism to involve OTA staff in a cooperative effort designed to help OTA be more effective in carrying out its mission. It will also be a way to learn from, and build on, past experience at OTA, NSF, and elsewhere; and to look comprehensively at all stages of the assessment process, from definition, planning, and execution to review, reporting, and utilization.

In the interest of having a broadly representative task force membership, I am asking each program manager to recommend one person from his or her program to serve on the task force. The persons selected should have a high level of interest and some expertise in TA methodology, an enthusiasm for the collaborative team effort which the task force will require, and should be prepared to devote up to 10% of their time (one half-day per week) to task force activities over the next several months. I would prefer that, where possible, task force members come from the project staff level, although in some cases the program manager may be in the best position to serve.

I am designating Fred Wood as task force chairperson, and ask that you provide him with your recommendations for task force membership by December 6. I will serve as an ex-officio member of the task force and will actively participate.

At present, we envision a nine-month task force effort, January through September 1980, which will provide multiple opportunities for meaningful participation by interested staff members. A possible task force plan of action might include the following activities:

January - Organize and establish task force agenda of work and division of responsibilities.

Jan-Feb - Research and outreach by task force working groups.

March - Working sessions with each OTA program staff.

April - Two seminars with outside participants (e.g. TA practitioners, TA users) for interested OTA staff.

May-June - Cross-cutting working sessions for interested OTA staff.

June-July - Preparation of task force report.

August - Sharing of results within OTA; review and revision.

Sept - Sharing of results with broader TA community, possibly including other countries.

A detailed plan and statement of objectives will be worked out at the first task force meetings in January. However, even at this early point, Fred and I would welcome your ideas on possible task force activities.

cc: Director's Chron
Dir Sub File
Central Files