

NASA's Office of Space Science and Applications: Process, Priorities and Goals

INTRODUCTION

This Background Paper summarizes a one-day workshop convened to assess the effectiveness of the planning and priority-setting mechanisms used by NASA's Office of Space Science and Applications (OSSA) in carrying out its diverse scientific program. The workshop was requested by the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and was structured to provide input to a study by the Committee's Task Force on the Health of U.S. Research. This examination of the NASA Space Science and Applications program is one of several case studies by the task force.¹

Workshop participants included a representative group of practicing scientists, research administrators, and policy analysts who discussed how OSSA sets its goals, plans its programs, and evaluates progress toward achieving goals and objectives. They also discussed how OSSA responds to changes in the external environment that require modification to its ongoing programs and to its long-term strategic planning. In addition, the workshop deliberations provided insight into current issues of OSSA program management and of the difficulties facing NASA as it adjusts to an era of fiscal stringency following a significant five-year expansion of the OSSA budget.

In preparation for the workshop, OTA developed a detailed set of issues pertaining to OSSA's planning, priority-setting, and performance assessment procedures for purposes of focusing the workshop discussions. The issues were drafted to meet the general needs of the broader House Task Force study while reflecting the specific characteristics of OSSA's scientific program. These issues were discussed by telephone with all of the invited participants and modified to reflect suggestions for clarifications and additional topics

¹ The Task Force is also examining, among others, fusion and mathematics research.

(App. A). The agenda for the workshop followed the broad groupings of the issues list.

Prior to the workshop, OTA invited each participant to write a short (3 -5 pages) response to selected issues. This brief summary of the workshop proceedings incorporates material from the discussions at the workshop, from the participants' issues papers, and from the background materials provided to OTA by the Office of Space Science and Applications. OTA has sought to make this summary useful for those who may not have detailed specialized knowledge of the programs, plans and organization of NASA's Office of Space Science and Applications. OTA prepared an initial draft of this paper, which was then sent to workshop participants and other knowledgeable individuals for review.