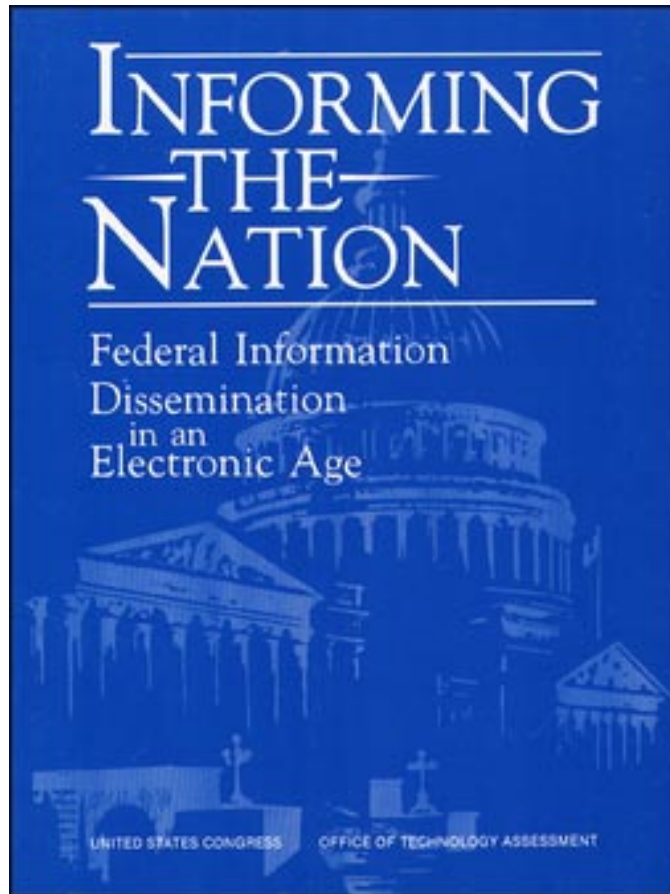


*Informing the Nation: Federal Information
Dissemination in an Electronic Age*

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Foreword

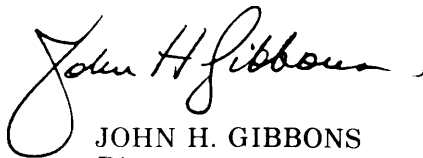
Federal information is essential to public understanding of many issues facing Congress and the Nation, and is used by all sectors of society. Technological advances are opening up many new and potentially cost-effective ways to collect, manage, and disseminate this information. Although traditional ink-on-paper publications will continue to meet important needs for the foreseeable future, many types of Federal information—such as statistical, reference, and scientific and technical—are well suited to electronic storage and dissemination. For example, an entire year's worth of the *Congressional Record* or several Bureau of the Census statistical series can be placed on one compact optical disk that can be *easily* read with a low-cost reader and basic microcomputer. Press releases, weather and crop bulletins, and economic or trade indices can be disseminated immediately via electronic bulletin boards or online information systems.

This report addresses the opportunities to improve the dissemination of Federal information. It also highlights two major problems: maintaining equity in public access to Federal information in electronic formats, and defining the respective roles of Federal agencies and the private sector in the electronic dissemination process. The report focuses on current and future roles of the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) and Superintendent of Documents, the Depository Library Program (administered by GPO), and the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). In addition, this report examines electronic dissemination of congressional information, the Freedom of Information Act in an electronic environment, and electronic dissemination of government information to the press.

In conducting this assessment, OTA drew on expertise and perspectives from numerous sources in and outside of the government. OTA received special assistance from the General Accounting Office (GAO) for the surveys of Federal information dissemination practices and Federal information users, from GPO with respect to Federal printing and related dissemination activities, and from NTIS with regard to dissemination of scientific and technical information. OTA appreciates the participation of the advisory panelists, contractors, working group participants, Federal agency officials and Federal information users who responded to the GAO surveys, and members of the library, academic, business, labor, consumer, and Federal agency communities, among others, who helped bring this report to fruition.

The report responds to an initial request from the Joint Committee on Printing and subsequent expressions of interest from the Subcommittee on Government Information, Justice, and Agriculture of the House Committee on Government Operations, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the Committee on House Administration, and the Subcommittee on Legislative of the House Committee on Appropriations.

The report is solely the responsibility of OTA, not of those who assisted us in the assessment or of the congressional committees who requested or endorsed the undertaking of the study.


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NOTE: OTA gratefully acknowledges the members of this advisory panel for their valuable assistance and thoughtful advice. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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*See appendix A for acknowledgments of GPO, GAO, and NTIS staff, agency officials, workshop participants, reviewers, and others who participated in the study.

**See appendix B for OTA project staff responsibilities.

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