

Section V

**ORGANIZATION  
AND OPERATIONS**

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Created by the Technology Assessment Act of 1972 (86 Stat, 797), OTA is a part of and is responsible to the legislative branch of the Federal Government. OTA received funding in November 1973 and commenced operations as the second session of the 93rd Congress convened in January 1974.

The Act provides for a bipartisan congressional Board, a Director, a Deputy Director, and such other employees and consultants as may be necessary to conduct the Office's work. The Board is assisted by a Technology Assessment Advisory Council comprising 10 public members eminent in scientific, technological, and educational fields, the Comptroller General of the United States, and the Director of the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. When requested, the Council may offer the Board advice on technology assessment matters.

The congressional Board sets the policies of the Office and is the sole and exclusive body governing OTA. The OTA Director is the chief executive officer and is responsible solely to the Board, on which he serves as a nonvoting member.

The congressional Board is made up of six senators, appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and six representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House, evenly divided by party. In 1977, Senator Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. , and Congressman Larry Winn, Jr., R-Kansas, served as the Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively of the Board. The two posts rotate between the Senate and House in alternate congresses. The Board members from each house select their respective officer.

In providing assistance to Congress, OTA is to: identify existing or probable impacts of technology or technological programs; where possible, ascertain cause-and-effect relationships; identify alternative technological methods of implementing specific programs; identify alternative pro-

grams for achieving requisite goals; estimate and compare the impacts of alternative methods and programs; present findings of completed analyses to the appropriate legislative authorities; identify areas where additional research or data collection is required to provide support for assessments; and undertake such additional associated activities as may be directed.

### Initiation, Processing, and Flow of Assessments

OTA functions primarily to provide congressional committees with assessments or studies which identify the range of probable consequences, social as well as physical, of policy alternatives affecting the uses of technology. Requests for OTA assessments may be initiated by:

- The chairman of any standing, special, select, or joint committee of Congress, acting for himself, at the request of the ranking minority member, or a majority of the committee members;
- The OTA Board; or
- The OTA Director, in consultation with the Board.

The authorization of specific assessment projects and the allocation of funds for their performance is the responsibility of the OTA Board. The Board has established priority areas of study, and has approved individual assessment projects within those areas. To facilitate these decisions, the Board considers recommendations and plans developed by OTA staff, and applies the following general selection criteria developed in consultation with the Advisory Council:

- Is this now or likely to become a major national issue?
- Can OTA make a unique contribution, or could the requested activity be done effec-

tively by the requesting committee or another agency of Congress?

- How significant are the costs and benefits to society of the various policy options involved, and how will they be distributed among various impacted groups?
- Is the technological impact irreversible?
- How imminent is the impact?
- Is there sufficient available knowledge to assess the technology and its consequences?
- Is the assessment of manageable scope can it be bounded within reasonable limits?
- What will be the cost of the assessment?
- How much time will be required to do the assessment?
- What is the likelihood of congressional action in response to this assessment?
- Would this assessment complement or detract from other OTA projects?

Assessments emerge from the combined effort of a staff with appropriate expertise, citizen advisory panels of experts, consultants, contractors, and other congressional information agencies. A particular assessment project may involve exploratory meetings or workshops of advisory panels, staff analyses and consultant studies.

Different approaches are used. The method employed, personnel involved, and the skills tapped depend on the technology under study, the requesting client, the nature of the issues at stake, and the time available for and the setting of the project. Required to consider the needs of Congress, the vast range of technological issues, and the resources available for a study, OTA remains flexible in its study methods.

All OTA assessments strive to be objective, nonpartisan, and authoritative. They must also be timely if they are to meet congressional timetables.

## **Staffing and Organizational Structure**

Staff professionals represent a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, including the physical and biological sciences, engineering, social sciences, law, and public administration. Professionals from executive branch agencies, detailed to OTA on a temporary basis, and participants in several congressional fellowship programs also contribute to the work of the Office.

A chart detailing OTA's organizational structure accompanies this section.

## **Financial and Administrative Activities**

An administrative officer oversees administrative and financial aspects of OTA operations, including procurement and contracting, budget and financial accounting and control, payroll, travel, office space, security, accounts payable and receivable, and other miscellaneous administrative support services.

A personnel officer is responsible for the development of personnel policies and procedures and their implementation. These include recruitment, selection, orientation and processing, classification, salary structuring, and performance evaluation.

A publications officer is responsible for the production, editing, layout and design, graphics, printing, and sale of OTA publications and other printed material.

In response to the growth in demand for OTA assessments and increased costs, the OTA Board approved budget requests totalling \$8.9 million for fiscal year 1978 for submission to Congress in 1977. Congress appropriated \$7.4 million to OTA for fiscal year 1978. OTA carried over about \$1.3 million from fiscal year 1977, and received \$281,000 for the governmentwide pay raise.

## **Information Services**

An information Services staff, which maintains an in-house library of books, reports, journals,



and other materials on science, technology, and related areas, supports OTA activities. The library serves as a liaison to the Library of Congress as well as to other libraries and organizations throughout the Nation in order to meet the information needs of the OTA staff.

Current awareness tools and a computerized literature search service, the latter providing access to more than 75 computerized data bases, provide staff members with an extensive array of information services. The library is available to members of the general public who have a specific interest in technology assessment or in the work of the Office.

### **Public Participation and Public Affairs**

Public involvement constitutes an important part of OTA's technology assessment process. In addition to the wide use of citizen advisory groups and consultants, the Office disseminates information to the various parties-at-interest so that they may become more effectively involved in OTA assessments. In keeping with this objective, meetings of OTA's congressional Board and Advisory Council are open to the public. An officer for public participation and a public affairs officer advise the OTA Director.

To support public involvement, the public affairs office through its mail list and the news media continually informs the general public, Congress, and affected or interested parties, of the initiation, status, and completion of assessments. The office responds to requests from both Congress and the general public for information about its activities. To further inform Congress and the public about OTA's activities, the public affairs office prepares and distributes the annual report.

### **Other Activities**

OTA participates with the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the Congressional Research Service (CRS) of the Library of Congress, and the General Accounting Office (GAO) in an inter-agency Research Notification System designed to coordinate the activities and exchange of information among the four congressional service organizations and avert duplication of effort. Representatives of the four agencies meet regularly, and each of the offices submits biweekly status reports on their program activities for publication in a central directory of congressional research activity.