

Table 1. Strengths & Weaknesses of Selected Sources of S&T Assessment Advice for Congress

	Congressional Agencies - Directly Accountable to Congress			Outside Government		
	FORMER OTA	GAO	CRS	NRC (NASEM)		
Authoritative	Expert advisory panels; dedicated and rotational staff, contractors, and consultants	Assigned staff—may have relevant expertise; limited involvement of external expertise	Dedicated issue area staff	Expert, often world-class appointed committees; dedicated staff; consultants	CREDIBILITY AND QUALITY	
Objective	Panel review of perspectives included; focused workshops; staff research; consultants	Staff research; expert meetings; limited external review or involvement of external expertise	Independent staff research; no formal external review or involvement of external expertise	Committee meetings; workshops; staff research; consultants; scope controlled by contract		
Independent	Scope approved by TAB; COI procedures for staff; all perspectives included and verified by advisory panel; options articulated; extensive external review	No TAB-like governance group oversight; no formally appointed expert committee or advisory panel; limited external review	Literature and individual research by experienced staff	Elaborate COI procedures for formally appointed committee and staff; rigorous external review		
All perspectives	Advisory panel with broad perspectives; workshops; research by dedicated staff, contractors, and consultants	Expert meetings to inform assigned staff	Institutional procedures and policies; no formal external review	Elaborate appointment of consensus committee (consensus required); workshops; staff research		
Peer review	Institutional review and extensive external review	Institutional review; limited but no formally accountable external review	Institutional review; no formal external review	Rigorous independent external review		
Relevant	Requests from committees of jurisdiction and priorities set by Technology Assessment Board	Agency selection based on requests; seldom commissioned by committees of jurisdiction	Response to all requests by charter	Studies commissioned by legislation and contract		SUITABILITY FOR CONGRESSIONAL CONTEXT
Presentation	Reports tuned to congressional context	Reports tuned to congressional context	Reports tuned to congressional context; now publicly available	Reports usually tuned more to executive agency needs		
Useful	Requests from committees of jurisdiction; priorities set by Technology Assessment Board	Seldom commissioned by committees of jurisdiction	Mostly "off-the-shelf" analysis, commissioned by individual members and staff	Commissioned by legislation and contract		
Report/follow-up	Staff and panel member briefings, testimony, and follow-up reports	Staff briefings, hearings	Staff briefings, occasionally hearings	Study committee members and staff disseminate report findings		
Shared staff	Project director and staff called upon for follow-up and analysis	Assessment staff who may be knowledgeable available for limited follow-up	Knowledgeable staff available for follow-up	Very limited follow-up		
Timely	Detailed, evidence-based, peer-reviewed reports with no recommendations	Often detailed reports with supporting evidence; limited peer review	Summary reports (CRS seldom produces major reports)	Lengthy process; detailed, evidence-based, peer-reviewed reports with recommendations; contract required		
Other products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> background papers interim reports issue papers issue papers shared staff follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forum highlights updates podcasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two-page "In Focus" briefings short-form "Insight" analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> letter reports phased reports release workshops workshop reports interim reports 		

■ Very Weak ■ Adequate
■ Weak ■ Strong
■ Moderate ■ Very Strong

DIMENSIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS