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Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Program Capabilities: Plain Language Summary

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Plain Language Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE) conducted a work analysis to understand the core program-level elements of behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) implementation in support of BTAM research and capacity-enhancing efforts by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) and National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Program Office.

This brief provides a framework to (a) guide practitioners' thinking about capabilities that support BTAM program implementation and (b) inform DHS about ways to measure and enhance BTAM capability at the state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) levels.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

We identified fifteen practitioner-informed capabilities for BTAM programs based on analysis of semi-structured interviews ($n=20$), a subject matter expert meeting ($n=18$), and a virtual feedback webinar ($n=14$) with BTAM experts from a variety of operating contexts, including education, workplace, healthcare, and law enforcement settings in urban and rural communities.

1. BTAM program capabilities included (a) personnel capabilities, (b) structural capabilities, and (c) fidelity to a defensible (i.e., systematic, evidence-informed practice within one's control to limit risk of harm) and sustainable BTAM process.
2. **Personnel capabilities** represent BTAM-related knowledge and skills that support BTAM activity and may differ depending on people's involvement in the BTAM process.
3. **Structural capabilities** include institutional, compositional, and operational resources that support and sustain systematic, rigorous BTAM activity.
4. **Fidelity to the BTAM process** involves commitment to pre-incident reporting, structured and multidisciplinary BTAM practice, and worker well-being.
5. BTAM implementation varies widely across settings, and the extent and form of the capabilities above will differ in practice. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach.

SUMMARY OF BASELINE BTAM PROGRAM CAPABILITIES

BTAM Program Capability	Definition
Personnel Capabilities	
1. Foundational BTAM knowledge	Familiarity and basic knowledge of BTAM goals, guiding principles, terminology, and strategies
2. Localized knowledge*	Knowledge of sector- and community-specific BTAM needs (including scope of BTAM activities), resources (for assessment or intervention), and operating constraints
3. Tiered threat assessment expertise	Collective knowledge and skills (depending on involvement in BTAM process) for identifying behaviors of concern within the decided scope of BTAM activities, gathering relevant information, and evaluating information to formulate threat risk
4. Threat management expertise	Shared knowledge and awareness of appropriate safety and intervention steps based on available sector-, organization-, and community-based resources
5. Legal, policy, and ethics knowledge	Understanding of BTAM-relevant legislation, policy, and ethical considerations for defensible practice
Structural Capabilities	
1. Institutional support*	Formal policies and/or informal supports that enable and justify the existence of a BTAM program
2. Multidisciplinary involvement*	Established avenues for obtaining multidisciplinary capability or supports for the BTAM process
3. Operational tools and flexible structures for the BTAM process*	Operational tools and structured, evidence-informed approaches that support processes for bystander reporting, triage, threat assessment, interventions, and case management
4. Routine BTAM training and education*	Regular access to onboarding, refresher, and continuing education programs for BTAM to ensure appropriate knowledge for all levels of BTAM involvement
5. Work management*	Capacity to organize, distribute, and complete BTAM activity sustainably (i.e., limiting staff burnout)
Fidelity to a Defensible and Sustainable BTAM Process	
1. Facilitating BTAM partners' commitment to pre-incident reporting*	Bystanders' (and other BTAM partners') awareness and commitment to recognizing and reporting early behavioral signs of risk to those involved with BTAM
2. Shared mission and trust among BTAM collaborators*	Unity and interpersonal trust, cooperation, and coordination for effective and efficient BTAM collaboration without interference from personal bias and ego
3. Multidisciplinary integration	Shared understanding and appreciation for the limits and utility of different disciplines for BTAM
4. Commitment to systematic and ongoing BTAM practice	Use of appropriate interventions to protect all parties involved based on dynamic assessments of potentially evolving circumstances
5. Care for well-being*	BTAM practitioners' commitment to supporting and maintaining worker well-being amidst failures and other traumatic exposures

Note. Capabilities denoted with an asterisk (*) were expressed by BTAM experts as especially valuable for BTAM program or activity sustainability. Critically, it should be acknowledged that BTAM can be performed rigorously by individuals, teams, or agencies in absence of some structural capabilities, such as limited institutional support, training access, or control over workload.

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About NCITE. The National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center, or NCITE, is a research consortium focused on counterterrorism and targeted violence prevention. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as a Center of Excellence. Based at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, NCITE includes 50+ researchers at partner institutions across the U.S. and Europe.

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