

Massage Therapy Body of Knowledge (MTBOK) Business Case Executive Summary

How professional competency is built in the massage field is a complex issue. Over the last several years, the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) has convened a series of discussions to explore this issue. Out of these discussions, the dominant message that has emerged is the need for the profession's key stakeholder groups (practitioners, educators, researchers, regulatory/licensing bodies, certification body, accreditation bodies, research organizations, professional membership and advocacy organizations, allied professions) to work together to develop consensus around the articulation of the Massage Therapy Body of Knowledge (MTBOK). In the context of associations and the fields they represent, a field's body of knowledge is generally described as *a compendium of what an individual must know and/or be able to do to successfully accomplish work in a specific field.*¹

The profession is at a key stage in its development. Work done now on the MTBOK will shape the future of massage therapy. The following vision for an initiative to articulate the profession's BOK has emerged from these ongoing discussions:

To develop and adopt across the massage therapy profession **a living resource of competencies, standards and values that inform and guide the domains of practice, licensure, certification, education, accreditation and research.**²

The MTBOK is a catalyst for the further evolution of the massage therapy profession.

A profession-wide initiative to articulate a common massage therapy body of knowledge would address current, important professional competency issues, as well as present significant immediate and long term opportunities for the profession.

1. The immediate need to address important professional competency issues
 - **There is no consistency in the articulation of the skills and knowledge necessary to become a massage therapist.** Currently schools, accrediting bodies, legislative bodies and the certification body must do their best to reflect the field's knowledge without a consistent foundation of information to guide their work. This has resulted in: inconsistent educational requirements and content; redundant activities across stakeholder groups; gaps in the current MTBOK; lack of a shared understanding of the MTBOK across the profession; and a patchwork of different massage therapy regulations and exemptions across the country.
2. Short term opportunities for the profession and its stakeholder groups
 - **The MTBoK initiative could create access to a "well" of shared information for the profession.** Using shared information could help create a mutual understanding of the massage therapy profession's body of knowledge and make it more meaningful when communicating to massage therapists and other stakeholders.
 - **A joint project and a shared output repository could save financial resources** by eliminating redundancy of activity across stakeholder groups, since the profession could access the same data source and eliminate the need for separate organizations to create all of their own information.

¹ Rops, Mickie S., Identifying and Using a Field's Body of Knowledge, ASAE Foundation, Washington, DC, 2002

² *Report from the Massage Therapy Body of Knowledge Meeting, Kansas City, Missouri, November 5-7, 2008*

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3. Longer term opportunities to capitalize on the initial investment stakeholder groups make in a common MTBOK
 - **Acceptance of massage as a regarded therapy in the field of health and wellness.** A significant portion of the massage therapy profession has long desired to become a more integral part of the US health and wellness system and reap the usual accompanying rewards of enhanced professional image, acceptance of massage as a legitimate health and wellness profession and practice, and significantly higher income potential.
 - **Massage therapy specialties and/or advanced practice levels -** Clarification of the body of knowledge could help the profession understand its evolutionary needs, including the possibility of articulating and providing profession-wide support for massage therapy specialties and/or advanced practice levels. The definition of the BOK for these specialties and advanced levels could also enrich the MTBOK.

At a November, 2008 meeting of key stakeholders in the profession, the scope of the MTBOK – the massage therapy elements or subject areas that fit within the agreed definition of the MTBOK – was divided into two categories: foundational elements and additional elements. It was agreed that the initial MTBOK effort needs to limit its focus to just the foundational elements, consisting of:

- Definition of massage therapy (scope of practice, terminology, describing the field)
- Definition of the competencies of an entry-level massage therapist, in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities.

The participants at this November, 2008 meeting agreed that the work of defining these foundational elements should be conducted by a taskforce independent from the control or undue influence of any stakeholder group or other professional entity. This taskforce will be comprised of professionals held in high regard and acknowledged as experts in the subject areas being defined. In addition, a project manager unaffiliated with any industry organization will be hired to manage and support the activities of the taskforce. It was discussed that as part of its independence, the taskforce will share its results with the profession broadly, and will not seek “approval” or “ratification” from any stakeholder group. However, the participants agreed that the taskforce should establish a process to circulate its findings for comment.

In the best interest of the profession, the participating organizations agreed their role in this project should be one of stewardship. This means they will not control the project but due to the importance of the work and its impact on the profession, they will be accountable for its success. The stewardship group is comprised of representatives from the American Massage Therapy Association, AMTA - Council of Schools, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals, Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards, Massage Therapy Foundation, and National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork. The first task of the stewardship group has been to produce this business case to gain the support of the leaders of the participating organizations for this vitally important initiative for the profession.

The stewardship group has agreed on the following definitions and shared values to guide their stewardship activities:

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Act as the true stewards of the MTBOK, in intention and in behavior (walk the talk), where stewardship is defined as follows:

“To hold something in trust for another. The willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the whole by operating in service, rather than in control. Accountability without control or compliance.” (Peter Block – “Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest,” 1993, Berret-Koehler)

At the heart of any successful initiative (like we intend the MTBOK effort to be) is a set of shared values – the attributes, beliefs, and behaviors the involved stakeholders hold to be most essential to the shared purpose and success of the initiative. These are considered to be its essence – what you try to follow and preserve, above all else, as you go about the work of the initiative. These are the shared values the stewardship group has defined to guide their work together as well as guiding the overall MTBOK initiative.

Shared Values of Stewardship:

- **Inclusion** - The MTBOK must be established for the profession by the profession. All major stakeholders in the profession should participate in some way.
- **Transparency** - Continuous two-way communication should be maintained in some form with all major stakeholders in the profession, including access to the work in progress and the results of the work.
- **Validity** - The MTBOK must be well vetted through a community of subject matter experts as well as through the larger community of stakeholders in the profession - practitioners, educators, researchers, organizations that support these professionals, consumers, allied professions, healthcare and spa employers/providers, etc. The MTBOK needs to continue to remain valid even as the profession and its environment evolve. It needs to have a commitment to an ongoing review through its evolution.
- **Breadth** – The MTBOK should be universally applicable across the full breadth of the massage therapy profession. The breadth of a BOK is typically expressed as the “scope of practice” of the profession – in this case, the boundaries within which massage therapists practice.
- **Independence** - The initiative should be conducted by a taskforce independent from the control or undue influence of any stakeholder group or other professional entity. As part of its independence, the taskforce should share its results with the profession broadly, and should not seek “approval” or “ratification” from any stakeholder group.
- **Adaptability/Flexibility** - Things are constantly changing during a complex initiative involving multiple stakeholders like this. So the people involved need to be able to quickly adapt to changes in their environment.
- **Collective Agreement** - The working relationship of the stewards will involve a collective agreement; each of the organizations and its principals agrees on a framework and “ground rules” for proceeding with this initiative.

As they continue to talk, the stewardship group will decide more specifically what its role should be and how it will act in that role. Some of the responsibilities that have been mentioned as part of the stewards’ role are:

- Help the Project Leader with any project start-up tasks that he or she may need– e.g., team orientation to what has already happened around the MTBOK, resource procurement, etc.
- Guide the Task Force in successfully producing its desired outcomes within available time and resource constraints.

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- Run political and resource procurement interference for the task force, freeing the task force as much as possible to do the real work of meeting the expected outcomes,
- Ensure that the MTBOK looks into the future as well as draws upon the past and present.
- Ensure the MTBOK is a holistic view of the whole profession.
- Ensure the MTBOK is accepted, recognized, and used as “the standard” for massage therapy across the whole profession as well as with external stakeholders

The Stewards' future work is intended to be self facilitated, conducted collectively and autonomously rather than through an outside facilitator. The Stewards will hold monthly conference calls with the Project Manager to discuss progress of the MTBOK project. The stewards will communicate the MTBOK progress back to the participating organizations as well as to interested stakeholders outside the massage therapy profession.

In addition to the stewardship group, the other key roles involved with the MTBOK initiative are a paid project manager and an eight person volunteer Task Force. The project manager will:

- direct and manage the efforts of the MTBOK Task Force Volunteers to ensure the Task Force Volunteers successfully produce their desired outcomes within the time and resource constraints
- serve as a public liaison for the Task Force Volunteers
- act as a conduit to the MTBOK Stewards.

A Project Manager Selection Committee, consisting of one representative each from ABMP, AMTA, MTF, and NCBTMB, will announce a call for candidates in February, 2009, conduct the selection process including face-to-interviews with the finalists, and select a suitable project manager from among the finalists. This position will serve a twelve-month contract beginning May 1, 2009 and will report directly to the MTBOK Stewards.

The newly hired Project Manager will begin her/his assignment by assisting a Task Force Volunteer Selection Committee in screening candidates to identify a list of finalists, conducting phone interviews with finalists, and final selection of the Task Force members. The Task Force Volunteer Selection Committee consists of one representative from each of the six stewardship groups.

The Volunteer Task Force will consist of eight subject matter experts in the field of massage therapy. Due to budget restraints, much of the task force work will need to be done virtually. A single face-to-face meeting of the full Task Force with the project manager and stewards will be conducted to launch the project. It will also be used to establish the trust-based relationships needed for effective collaboration, that are much harder to create virtually. Another meeting will be needed close to the end of the project between the project manager and the stewards to review the deliverables produced by the initiative and to plan for their dissemination. To keep costs down, video conferencing will be explored as a possible way to conduct this deliverables meeting. It could also be used to conduct other meetings of the Task Force with the project manager and stewards. For example, after completing the first draft of the BoK, everyone could video conference to discuss and plan how it could best be vetted. The work of the Volunteer Task Force is estimated to take at least 9 months beginning July 1, 2009.

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A website will be created for the MTBOK effort (www.MTBOK.org). This website will serve as the official source for all MTBOK information. For example, the call for resumes plus details about the Project Manager position, including the selection timeline, selection criteria, and contract fulfillment expectations, deliverables, and payments are available on the mtbok.org site. Details about the Task Force Volunteer position, including the call for resumes and the selection criteria and timeline, are also available on the mtbok.org site.

Other online tools will be needed to support the virtual work of the Project Manager and Task Force, including:

- Online authoring & collaboration tool for Task Force to use for most of its team communication, co-authoring/editing, version control, and document storage.
- Online vetting/call for comment tool to support the call for comments process as well as the organization, storage, and analysis of the expected high volumes of responses.

Research has already been conducted of possible tools to use for these activities, which will be passed on to the project manager for his/her final selection of Task Force support tools (within the budget constraints for tools specified by the Stewards).

Although the Stewards will not control the detailed planning and work of the Task Force, they will retain ultimate accountability for the success of the initiative. To maintain this accountability without direct control of the Task Force's work, the Stewards need some way of guiding the work of the Task Force without micro managing it. To do this the Stewards will use a combination of:

- Select the right people for the project manager and task force volunteer positions (including the right mix or chemistry of the nine people who have to work together as a high performance team) and then trust that they will produce the desired outcomes with a minimum of additional direction from the stewards or the participating organizations
- Hold the project manager contractually accountable for the deliverables expected from this initiative (described below)
- Monitor progress through monthly reviews with the project manager
- Run political interference for the Task Force so they can concentrate on their work rather than trying to deal with the constant barrage of stakeholder communications and other work interruptions that the participating organizations are used to handling as part of their daily routines.
- Ensure the Task Force has the resources they need to do their work (within pre-established monetary constraints, but offering as much other non-monetary support as possible to expedite their work)
- Provide a set of principles to guide the Task Force in doing their work.

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Principles to guide the work of the Task Force:

- The shared values of the Stewards
- Intellectual Honesty
- Integrity
- Transparency – ongoing communication with stewards
- Validity
- Frugality
- Timelines
- Best practices for teamwork
- Impartiality
- Use generally accepted Health and Wellness terminology
- Use APA Style format
- Intellectual Property rights for the MTBOK should be open access through MTBOK.org, with appropriate level of open access rights assigned by Stewards

Expected Deliverables from the Initiative:

A document/dissertation of the foundational elements of the MTBOK consisting of:

- Definition of massage therapy (scope of practice, terminology, describing the field) using best practices of body of knowledge for each of these areas.
- Definition of the competencies of an entry-level massage therapist, in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities.

The Stewards will monitor the form of the deliverable via ongoing interaction with the project manager

It was agreed by the Stewards that these deliverables produced by the MTBOK initiative will be given to the profession and interested stakeholders outside the profession without expectation of financial return. They will freely encourage use of the MTBOK because it is the responsibility of the stewards to champion full integration of this work throughout the massage therapy profession and with key stakeholders outside the profession. Attribution will be required.

The Stewards established the following milestones to use as guideposts to help them monitor progress on the initiative as well as to plan for delivery and dissemination of the results.

Initiative Milestones –

- July 2009 – Project Manager and Task Force face-to-face meeting
- Fall 2009 - Abstract submission for Highlighting Conference
- Fall 2009 - Webinar presentation by project manager to steward group
- April 30, 2010 - Delivery of Task Force MTBOK report
- May 10, 2010 - Press release and other communication of results – coincides with Highlighting Conference
- May 14, 2010 – Presentation of MTBOK report at Highlighting Conference in Seattle, WA