



SABS officially stands for "Station Activity Benchmarking System," but could just as easily be an acronym for "Systemic Analysis for Better Solutions."

What is SABS?

SABS is the latest evolution of the PBMA Benchmarking Survey and its intent is to take the data to a new level - one that maximizes the use of the benchmark data at the functional level with the station and creates a process for an enterprise-wide approach to making strategic decisions.

Why is SABS important?

SABS is critically important to a station because it provides the link between the departmental goals within the station and the overall strategic direction of the station. By viewing the station horizontally across all of its functions, staff becomes more aware of the interactions and dependencies between various departments and among activities. By building this cross-functional awareness and leveraging upon it, the station can begin to make decisions that truly design initiatives and allocate resources in a selective and informed manner. Because this systemic approach does involve the entire enterprise, it should result in decisions that dovetail with the station's strategic direction. If the resulting initiatives do not align with the strategic direction, they must be reconsidered carefully in light of this. If the station's strategic direction is outdated or poorly defined, this process will easily highlight the need for effective strategic planning.

What can I do to help with the SABS reporting process?

As a general manager, there are ways that you can ensure the value of SABS and thereby reap the rewards it offers.

- **Make the survey input a priority**
 - Communicate with your staff the importance of taking the time to respond and to correctly contribute to survey questions. For example, determining how much of an individual's time is spent on various tasks influences how much those activities actually cost the station. Correctly assigning FTE's to activities is extremely important.
 - Assist your financial manager in developing a process that allows him or her to request input from each department thereby allowing this to be an activity for all managers and not just an exercise for

the finance office alone. By doing so, the individual managers will understand what really goes into the survey and it involves them, so that when the output is available, the numbers are not unfamiliar to them.

- **Analyze the output**

While the Executive Summary is extremely useful for the general manager and provides an excellent thumbnail sketch of the station, allow time for a discussion with each functional manager about the more in-depth analysis of his or her areas of responsibility. This can be conducted in a variety of ways, but a clear case can be made for the value of having this done at a staff meeting. Challenge the manager to focus on the key issues and metrics as well as trends, both positive and negative in their operation and implications for their function and the station as a whole.

- **Assist staff in seeing the links**

Explore beyond the individual functions. Ask your staff to consider interactions between the other functions. Additionally, question what unexpected side-benefits (or pitfalls) could result from a specific course of action. Link the activity or idea back to the strategic plan and consider how it lines up with what the station wants to achieve.

- **Reward brainstorming and idea generation**

Create an atmosphere that makes it exciting to explore unusual and different ideas. Allow the flexibility for staff to explore potentially fruitful concepts beyond the idea stage to real proposals for consideration. Reward promising plans with resources for implementation.

- **Develop concrete action plans**

Decisions resulting from the SABS review should be made into action plans that have clear and measurable objectives. Have your managers assign what, when and by whom activities should be done. Follow-up on the activities and incorporate them into performance reviews.

- **Incorporate actions plans into the budget**

Make sure that the budget reflects the activities and resource choices that managers have made. If the decision is made to emphasize a certain activity, budget the activity to reflect that as well as reducing budgets elsewhere where activities will be de-emphasized.

- **Reward the behavior you desire**

- Reward thoughtful, cross-functional decision making among your staff.
- Reward resource trade-offs.

- Reward ideas that look beyond functional silos and show a clear understanding and concern for the station as a whole.
- By rewarding those behaviors that produce the results you want and by providing an environment that fosters those results, you will spend less time managing your managers and more time leading your station into the future.

Let SABS – the Systemic Analysis for Better Solutions – put your station’s future into focus.