Strategic Acquisition & Bid Readiness (SABR)

Strategic Acquisition & Bid Readiness (SABR) Overview

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WINNING WORDS

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List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

Acronym or Abbreviation	Description
B&P	Bid and Proposal
BD	Business Development
Bus.	Business
CPRI	Capture and Proposal Readiness Indicator
Dev.	Development
DR	Decision Review
e.g.	For Example
EN	Evaluation Notice
etc.	Etcetera
FPR	Final Proposal Revision
i.e.	In Other Words
IFN	Item for Negotiation
IMP	Integrated Master Plan
IMS	Integrated Master Schedule
LLC	Limited Liability Company
Mfg.	Manufacturing
Ops	Operations
Pwin	Probability of Win
RFP	Request for Proposal
ROI	Return on Investment
SABR	Strategic Acquisition and Bid Readiness
SOW	Statement of Work
USD	United States (U.S.) Dollars
WBS	Work Breakdown Structure

Introduction

This paper introduces the Strategic Acquisition and Bid Readiness (SABR) approach for competitive capture and proposal activities, identifying its purpose, major components, and a summary description of how its implementation improves capture and proposal effectiveness—increasing a company's Probability of Win (Pwin).

This document is not intended to provide a detailed description of the various processes and steps (e.g. capture planning, capture management, decision review contents, proposal planning tools, processes, etc.) used in implementing the SABR approach. Rather, this document's goal is to demonstrate how all of these things can work together to help our clients increase their competitiveness and maximize their Pwin.

What is SABR?

SABR provides a flexible, yet integrated, process-driven approach to enhancing any team's performance across the key phases of the business development (BD) lifecycle where companies plan and execute capture and proposal activities.

Developing the initial concept and approach in 1985, Winning Through Words, LLC's founder has been measuring, adding to, and improving SABR ever since. Today's SABR version is the result of applying over 25 years of lessons learned in both the commercial and government industries – serving both domestic and international markets – to produce a program that:

- Scales to support small companies with very little staff or very large, multi-national corporations that support global sales organizations,

- Provides the flexibility needed to allow entry into the process at various points within the Business Development (BD) lifecycle,

- Provides forums to communicate information, determine opportunity status and needed actions, and engage a company's senior leadership to help guide and enhance the team's efforts

- Enables sound bid/no bid decision making,

- Provides performance metrics that serve as leading indicators of capture and proposal success,

- Allows the sales/BD organization, capture management, and proposal management teams to work as a truly integrated group, and

- Promotes ease of knowledge transfer and information sharing throughout the process, ensuring the proposal team can leverage the capture information that maximizes a proposal's effectiveness.

Understanding How SABR Enhances the Business Development Lifecycle

To understand how SABR complements the BD lifecycle, it is best to start by ensuring a common starting point in our understanding. While there are as many different variations to this lifecycle as there are companies claiming to be the inventors of the term, for this purpose, Figure 1 serves as our baseline.
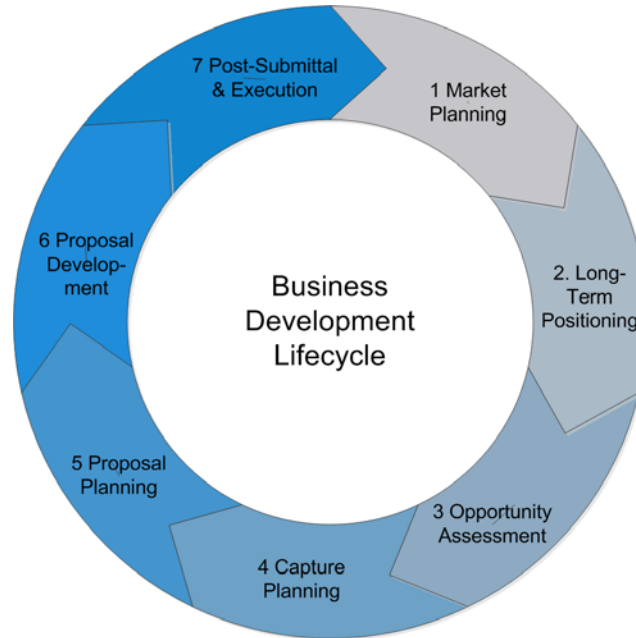
Figure 1. The BD lifecycle should be an iterative process, always looking for ways to improve.

SABR is not a replacement for the BD lifecycle, it is an adjunct set of tools, processes, and performance measurements that help clients in those areas where specific new business target opportunities are actively pursued (i.e. the capture phase) and sales are made (i.e. the proposal phase). Figure 2 shows where SABR fits within the BD lifecycle.

SABR Focuses on These Critical Areas
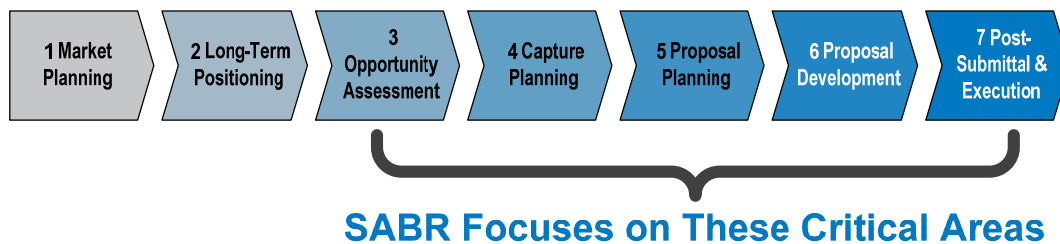
Figure 2. SABR enhances your company's focus on critical capture and proposal activities.

While lifecycle activities such as market planning (i.e. determining what market spaces your company can occupy and compete in through strategic planning), and long-term positioning (i.e. developing marketing campaigns to position your company within a market space and identify potential opportunities) are very important, *SABR was designed to help companies focus on capturing, or winning, new business opportunities deemed worthy of the investment in time, money, and resources needed to pursue effectively*.

SABR Components

SABR consists of several interrelated components that can operate as independent processes or activities, but when used together provide optimal efficiency across an organization. Without question, the most important component of any new business pursuit is the organization itself. As depicted in Figure 3, an effective capture and proposal organization consists of different groups of team members, with different skill sets, performing very different tasks—all with one common goal.
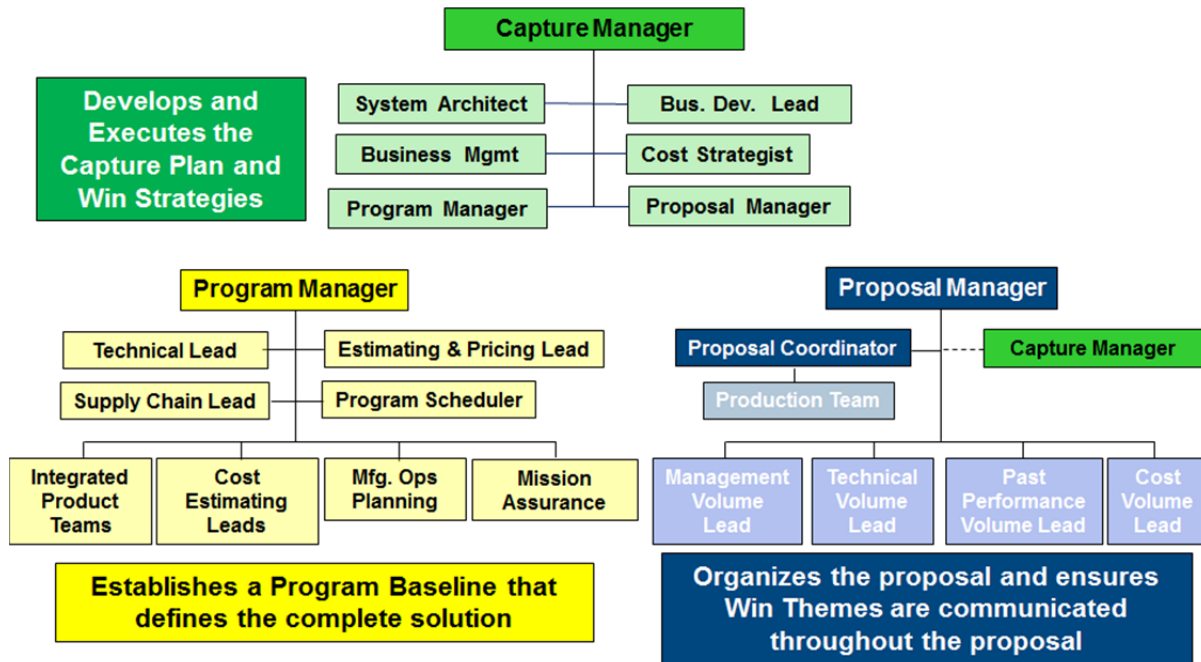
Figure 3. Three Different Groups, Three Different Roles, One Team with One Goal!

While outside of a clearly defined capture management or proposal management function, the role played by the Program/Project Manager and their team (shown bottom-left of Figure 3) is an integral part in ensuring that the solution offered in the proposal is:

1. Designed around the customer's needs and requirements, which includes having worked with the BD and capture personnel to help define, shape, or influence those requirements.

2. Providing maximum value to the customer (i.e. value to your company $\neq$ value to your customer).

3. Validated with the customer, through effective communications, to ensure their understanding and agreement with the approach before writing the proposal.

4. Executable by the company (i.e. often, in their zeal to win a proposal, company's make business decisions that introduce unacceptable levels of risk into the offer, which all too often leads to losing what should have been a winning proposal).

> The best way to build a winning team is to make the right people available rather than trying to make the available people right.

Engagement Phases

As shown in Figure 4, there are two major engagement phases within SABR. Each engagement phase contains three discrete subordinate phases that consist of specific activities performed by the corresponding lead organization (i.e. capture team or proposal team).

SABR's Capture Phase		
Planning	Execution	Sustainment

SABR's Proposal Phase		
Pre-Proposal	Proposal Development	Post-Submittal
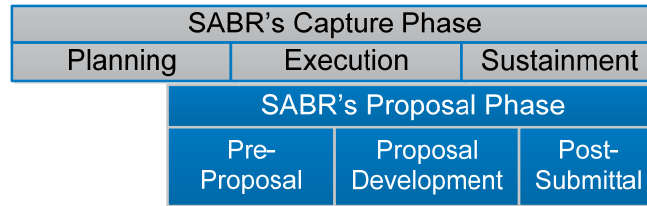
Figure 4. SABR's Engagement Phases are led by different teams sharing a common goal.

It is important to note that while the two engagement phases overlap, the two teams are working independently of the other a majority of the time, with leadership team members remaining in sync with each other through an effective communications channel—ensuring everyone remains engaged, empowered, and informed.

SABR's Capture Phase

The capture phase consists of three linear phases that build upon the earlier activities. They are:

- Planning—Consisting of various customer and competitor intelligence gathering and assessment activities, development of a comprehensive capture plan, and Win Strategies that define the actions needed to result in an effective capture

- Execution—Which, as the name implies, is executing the various components of the capture plan such as customer contact plan, marketing plan, additional Black Hat sessions, decision reviews (described later), Price-to-Win, transitioning to proposal development and support of the proposal effort, etc.

- Sustainment—Encompassing continued proposal team support and sustaining capture activities such as marketing/advertising, intelligence collection and assessment, etc.

SABR's Proposal Phase

Like the capture phase, SABR's proposal phase has three subordinate phases, consisting of:

- Pre-Proposal—Includes supporting the capture team, proposal strategy development and proposal planning, initial development of the programmatic drafts (e.g. Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), Integrated Master Plan/Integrated Master Schedule [IMP/IMS] products, historical cost information, Statement of Work [SOW], etc.), proposal budgeting, Industry Day participation, Win Theme development and validation, pre-writing proposal sections, developing storyboards/writing outlines, etc.

- Proposal Development—Consisting of all planning finalization following receipt of and review of the Request for Proposal (RFP), kick-off meeting, color review scheduling, decision review meeting support, proposal development, production, and delivery

- Post-Submittal—Encompassing numerous post-submittal "housekeeping" activities, responding to customer Evaluation Notices (ENs) or Items for Negotiation (IFNs),

preparation of the Final Proposal Revision (FPR), decision review support, planning for the post-award debrief, preparing information to support the lessons learned review, updates to your proposal library (if any), providing transitional support to the program execution team (notice the assumption of winning made here), and archival of the proposal and its associated work products.

Capture and Proposal Processes

Well-defined processes drive the performance of the respective capture and proposal teams during SABR's engagement phases. Built upon best practices from across the industry, *these proven, effective processes have served to guide successful capture and proposal efforts to realizing over $26 billion USD in contract awards (initial award values) since 1990.*

Decision Reviews

Shown at the bottom of Figure 5, Decision Reviews provide SABR's "on-ramps" and "off ramps", serving as both informative review meetings and as decision points for moving forward with any competitive new business pursuit. In most implementations, leaders of the various functional entities within an organization attend the Decision Reviews, chaired by a senior executive or their appointee. This approach provides a forum through which the responsible BD, capture, and proposal leads receives guidance and support from what is typically the most experienced leadership within the organization.
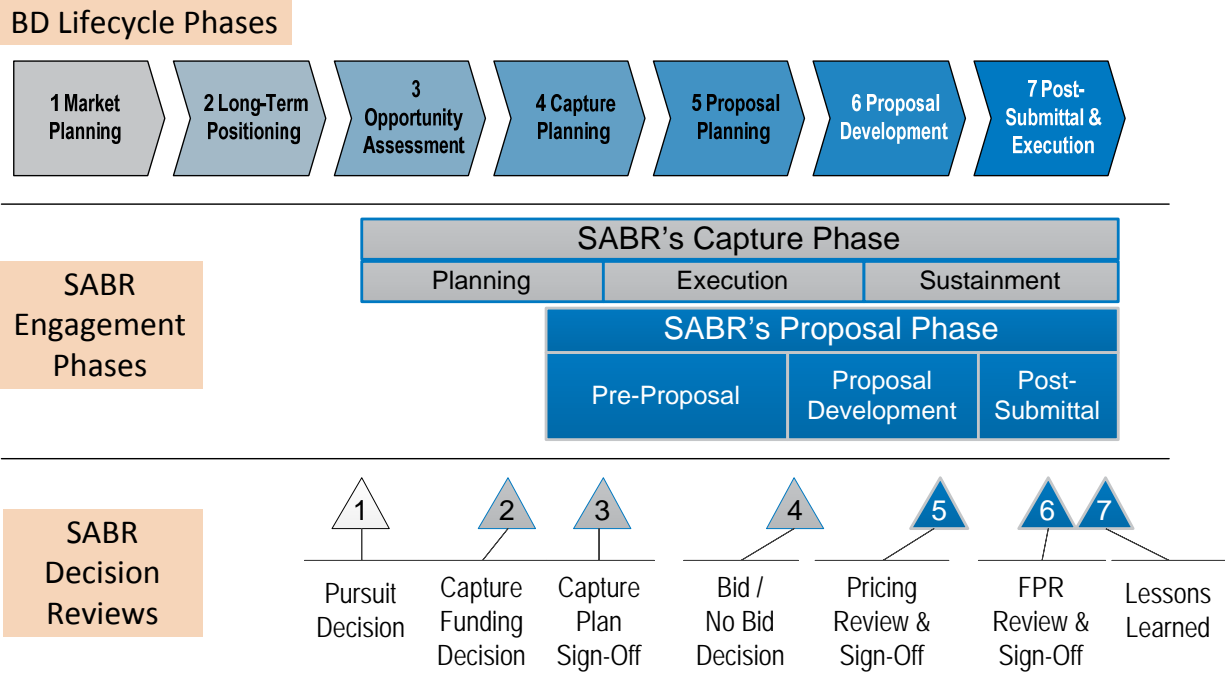
Figure 5. Decision Reviews align with the BD lifecycle and supports each Engagement Phase.

Table 1 describes each of the seven Decision Reviews and a general timeline for when each review should be held to support the various capture and proposal activities required.

Table 1. SABR's Decision Reviews enable companies to make informed business decisions about continuing its investment by moving forward into the next phase.

Decision Review	Description	Led By	Review Timeframe
1 – Pursuit Decision	Decision made on whether or not opportunity should be pursued, based on market alignment & strategic factors. When the decision to move forward is made, the Business Development representative leads the discovery effort needed to reach the next milestone (i.e. Decision Review 2)	BD Lead	18-24 months prior to RFP release
2 – Capture Funding Decision	Decision to assign Capture Manager, stand-up team, & provide initial funding to develop capture plans and other associated activities	Capture Manager	12 months prior to RFP release
3 – Capture Plan Signoff	Review of capture plan, to include Win Strategies and Capture Execution Plan. Decision to continue & additional funding approval obtained at this review	Capture Manager	6-8 months prior to RFP release
4 – Bid/No Bid Decision	Review of capture effectiveness, Pwin determination, and RFP to determine final bid or no bid decision status	Capture Manager	Within 3 days of final RFP receipt
5 – Pricing Review & Bid Sign-off	Review of final Cost/Price information, accompanied by initial decision/sign-off to submit proposal **Note:** Final submission approval typically requires additional reviews, dependent upon level of sign-off needed	Proposal Manager	Minimum of 10 days prior to proposal submission
6 – Final Proposal Revision Review & Sign-Off	Impact review of all ENs/IFNs & other discussions, resultant delta cost/price changes, accompanied by decision/sign-off to submit FPR	Proposal Manager	Minimum of 2 days prior to FPR submission
7 – Lessons Learned	Post-Award (and debrief) review of all capture and proposal activities, with identification of successes, failures, and sharing of lessons learned to improve future performance. If loss resulted, also initiates initial recovery planning	Capture & Proposal Manager	Not later than 10 days following customer debriefing (or any ensuing protests)

In almost all cases, development of the Decision Review information begins with a template for each review. These templates, or guidelines, identify the information required for each review. While customized to meet the unique needs of each client implementing SABR, each Decision Review requires some specific information pieces that are considered crucial in making informed decisions about the health and fidelity of the effort itself and whether or not to proceed to the next step in the process.

The respective lead presents each Decision Review, dependent upon where they are in the process. The Decision Reviews themselves can be a formalized presentation or merely a question and answer session following the independent review of the information.

Performance Metrics

Other than improving your company's ability to win competitive proposals and grow your business, one of the most beneficial aspects of SABR is its ability to be a leading indicator of the overall health of your capture, and proposal organizations. Using key performance measures to monitor, analyze, and compare your capture and proposal performance over time enables you to accurately identify both positive and negative trends and make adjustments to your approaches before they begin to deteriorate your team's morale and your company's ability to compete effectively.

SABR uses three sets of performance metrics; each focusing on various aspects of the approach. *The application of performance metrics provide you a data-driven, analytical method to drive improvement in your capture and proposal effectiveness.*

Capture & Proposal Readiness Indicators

Developed more than 20 years ago, our Capture and Proposal Readiness Indicator (CPRI) is an integrated assessment tool to perform gap analyses of your capture and proposal efforts against the best practices within SABR. With CPRI, assessments are performed prior to Decision Review 3 (Capture Plan Sign-off) and Decision Review 4 (Bid/No-Bid Decision) reviews.

Assessment of each SABR engagement phase looks at specific key activities and results, assessing their effectiveness and output quality on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 indicating an exceptional level of success or preparedness.

In the 22+ years of using this assessment tool, those efforts with a rating of 70% or higher have won 96% of the time. Those efforts with a rating of less than 60% have lost 84% of the time.

Capture Assessment

The capture readiness CPRI assessment identifies the capture team's readiness to develop and execute on the capture plan (i.e. do they have the information needed to formulate and execute an effective capture plan). It can also include an assessment of the team's adherence to your SABR process implementation. Our capture assessment process looks at several key areas of your capture effort to help identify those key items that have proven to affect a company's Pwin. Figure 6 identifies the major CPRI factors examined during this assessment.

Pursuit Effort: <Enter Opportunity Name Here>		
CPRI Factors	**CPRI Score (Average)**	**Color Rating**
Capture Team Activity/Engagement		
Customer Knowledge	7.0	G
Understanding of Customer Need	8.3	P
Customer Acquisition History	6.3	G
Capture / Strategy Planning and Development	7.0	G
SABR Process Adherence		
Decision Reviews	7.0	G
DR-3 CPRI Rating:	**7.1**	G

Figure 6. Capture Engagement Phase CPRI ratings focus on the health of your capture effort.

Proposal Assessment

The proposal readiness CPRI assessment identifies the proposal team's readiness to develop a compliant, cost-effective, cohesive, compelling proposal. Figure 7 identified the major CPRI factors examined during this assessment.

Pursuit Effort: <Enter Opportunity Name Here>		
CPRI Factors	**CPRI Score (Average)**	**Color Rating**
Proposal Team Readiness		
Proposal Team Organization	7.0	G
Proposal Strategy and Planning	8.0	P
B&P Funding Analysis	7.0	G
Proposal Resource Analysis	9.3	B
Pre-Proposal Activities	7.8	G
DR-4 CPRI Rating:	**7.5**	G

Figure 7. Proposal Engagement Phase CPRI ratings identify your readiness to develop a winning proposal.

Capture Performance Metrics

Capture-specific metrics measure very specific aspects of the capture phase's effectiveness. These include areas such as:

- Capture Engagement Phase CPRI ratings
- Customer Influence Effectiveness
- Proposal Evaluation Comparison
- Capture to Contract Value Ratio
- Others

Proposal Performance Metrics

Proposal engagement phase metrics focus on areas such as:

- Proposal Engagement Phase CPRI ratings
- Cost per page
- Proposal Readability (using Flesch-Kincaid or other acceptable measurement)
- B&P Cost per Phase Analysis
- B&P Cost to Value Ratio
- ROI of B&P Dollar Invested
- Others