

2024 FALL NATIONAL BOARD REPORT

Comments in Blue by Larry Sealy, Region 7 Director
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The ACBL Board of Directors held its fall meetings face-to-face (F2F) Sunday, November 24 through Tuesday, November 26 in Las Vegas. The Board and Committees continue to meet regularly through Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Attendance (10,301 tables) was greater than projected (mid-upper 9000s). This was due to the popularity of Las Vegas, as well as cheap room rates. We will be returning to Las Vegas in Summer 2027.

FINANCE

The 2025 operating and capital budgets were approved. Budgeted revenues for 2025 total ~\$18.5M while estimated operating and administrative expenses total ~\$18.2M; an estimated gain of approximately \$300K.

As of September, we experienced a net gain of over \$1M, much better than the budgeted loss of ~\$400K.

The capital budget totals \$770K, the majority of which will be spent on the modernization and migration of applications that reside on the AS400. It is anticipated that this project will be completed in the fall of 2025.

The AS400 is a computer system that was first released in 1988. It has needed replacing for some time.

AUDIT

The Audit Committee solicited proposals from firms to conduct audit and tax services for the ACBL from 2024 to 2027. Management and the Committee reviewed the proposals. CBIZ was selected due to attractive pricing combined with non-profit experience. The Board unanimously approved the selection.

MEMBERSHIP

As of November 1, there were 128,622 paid ACBL members; a decrease of 1,964 year over year. Member retention efforts have yielded significant results, increasing from 6.7 percent to 52.9 percent. Of the 4,386 players who became guest members, 1,181 have converted to full memberships. 1,578 remain active guest members.

To attract new players, ACBL has launched BridgeWar, an online game that blends the strategic depth of bridge with the fast-paced simplicity of the game, War. It is easy and it is free. Go to <https://www.acbl.org/bridgewar> for details.

SUPPORTING F2F CLUBS

ACBL has launched ACBL Clubhouse to provide a quality online playing experience for its members while providing rebates to F2F clubs. Clubhouse will become ACBL's main

online platform, managing large-scale games while smaller, independent clubs retain local identity. Go to <https://www.acbl.org/portfolio/daily-online-games/> for details.

Management is moving most pigmented (gold, red, silver) point games to the Clubhouse. This will leave Virtual Clubs with only black point games (and the online North American Pairs qualifiers, that award red points). I believe this will have a negative impact on the VACBs.

I fought against this since we heard of the plan in the summer. Unfortunately, I did not have enough support to change things. I hope to get additional 2x games for the VACBs and possibly a few weeks of silver point games.

STRATEGIC

The Committee of the Full Board reaffirmed the priorities of the organization. Focus will remain on membership recruitment and retention, financial stability and combating cheating, mainly online. Efforts to modernize software applications continue. Phase 1 of BackOffice, aimed to streamline internal processes while improving efficiency, is now complete with a full rollout expected in 2025.

A Membership Recruitment and Retention Task Force, a Club Task Force, an NABC Task Force and an Online Provider Task Force were formed in 2024 to facilitate and streamline the planning process. Each were comprised of Board members and non-Board liaisons. The Task Forces, with the exception of the Online Provider Task Force, have concluded their work, providing recommendations for the future.

The Membership Recruitment and Retention Task Force supports the launch of a Social Bridge Division, identified pathways to participation, required infrastructure and strategies for engagement. ACBL now holds a social bridge night online. Visit: <https://www.acbl.org/portfolio/social-bridge/>

The Club Task Force solicited club best practices and improved the functionality and content of the Club Corner page of the ACBL website.

The NABC Task Force developed strategies to revitalize the current NABC Model to maximize attendance, customer satisfaction and the profitability of future NABCs. Experimental formats and schedules were presented.

I served on this Task Force. I led the sub-group dealing with NABC Site Rotation. Going forward, we will emphasize sites that have historically had good attendance, provide for an excellent player experience, and are (mostly) contained in one hotel. We will also attempt to provide a geographical balance. There will be about 8-10 cities that we try to go to every four years (or so). There will be another list of alternate cities to visit less frequently. Since we cannot guarantee availability or a favorable contract, these numbers will provide rough guidance to the Site Selection Committee.

ACBL Online Provider strategy will foster innovation, eliminate dependency on one provider and give ACBL the flexibility to meet the current and future needs of its members. Its strategy includes offering e-sanctions to educational platforms and to tech platforms to hold ACBL games. Current trials with a number of potential platforms are well underway.

The current BBO contract ends on June 30. Negotiations are nearing completion.

COMBATING ONLINE CHEATING

ACBL continues to use a Computer-Based Cheating Detection Program (CBCD), EDGAR (Everyone Deserves a Game Above Reproach), to detect cheating in ACBL Masterpoint® (MP) games held on BBO.

ACBL submits monthly requests to The EDGAR Association (TEA). There was a two-month hiatus after Toronto when CDR changes were being coordinated. 7231 players have been submitted to TEA for screening since February 1. A total of 23,239 players have been examined. This includes partners of the submitted players as well as some redundancy (some players may have been submitted more than once, e.g., due to being under “Heightened Scrutiny” and then being part of a random draw for screening). 347 players identified by EDGAR as cheating have been charged. Additionally, over 250 are needing further review. The rate of cheating is currently between two and three percent.

The Code of Disciplinary Regulations (CDR) was modified, effective November 1, 2024.

The key changes are:

- Fast Track Discipline (FTD) opened up to all MP levels. Discipline begins with a Warning for players with fewer than 500 Masterpoints and no Platinum Points. Suspensions run from three-months to three-years, depending on MP holding (assuming the player completes an Ethics Certification/Fair Play Pledge and admits to the charge).
- Eliminated automatic enhancements for Unit/District officials.
- If an end time of cheating is clear, the penalty is now based on the player’s MP holding at the time cheating ended.
- Players can be removed from FTD in special situations (Office of National Recorder/Appeals & Charges Committee to coordinate).

Approximately 83,000 ACBL members have played in ACBL games held on BBO since 2020. All of them will be screened. The November 1 changes to the CDR will allow players to be run more quickly, since the FTD process is automated. We now hope to finish running of all online players in mid-2025.

144 players have accepted FTD based on charges stemming from EDGAR results. 48 have agreed to Negotiated Resolutions (NR). Nine players had their cases resolved by Expedited Disciplinary Panels (EDP). EDPs are nominally used in lieu of The Institute for Bridge Arbitration (IBA), when players are non-responsive. 12 players have had their cases resolved by IBA and 11 had resigned to avoid discipline. 27 cases are pending.

APPEALS AND CHARGES

The Appeals and Charges Committee Chair reported on the 14 NRs completed

between July and mid-November of 2024. Ten, all approved, were for Ethical Violations identified by EDGAR Two were for Misuse of Hand Records (self-kibitzing by a playing director): one was approved, one rejected with a condition for acceptance specified. Two were for Conduct Violations: one was approved, and the other was rejected with a condition for acceptance specified.

Hearing Reports and the Under Discipline List can be found on the Ethics & Discipline page of the ACBL website: <https://www.acbl.org/ethics/>.

As the Chair of the Appeals and Charges Committee, I work closely with the Office of the National Recorder and TEA in efforts to clean up our game.

Upholding ACBL Disciplinary Guidelines

The ACBL Board of Directors approved amendments to the ACBL Codification and the ACBL Code of Disciplinary Regulations (CDR) to preclude ACBL members Not in Good Standing from participating in United States Bridge Federation (USBF), Canadian Bridge Federation (CBF), and Federacion Mexicana de Bridge (FMB) Team Trials and subsequent international bridge competitions. Both the Codification and the CDR state that members Not in Good Standing cannot represent any NBO in world and zonal competitions and that the ACBL Board of Directors has the authority to withhold funding to these organizations for noncompliance.

We believe this will avoid any future issues with players who are on probation for 1st Degree ethical violations playing in qualifying events for World Championships.

GOVERNANCE/COMMUNICATIONS

Governance continues to streamline the ACBL Codification, the compilation of the rules and regulations passed by the Board. The goal is to create a user-friendly document that is less complex in language and in structure.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for ACBL regulations, policies and procedures are complete and include definitions, scope and positions responsible for enforcement. The SOPs are being used to identify ACBL regulations, policies and procedures that will be removed from the Codification and then “live” in an online document library for ease of access and scheduled/periodic review. Redundancies and outdated provisions and language will continue to be removed from the Codification.

Governance/Communications produces the *National Board Report* and provides content for the Board page of the *ACBL Bridge Bulletin*. Board policies and protocols are being reviewed.

As part of its preparation for meetings in Las Vegas, Governance put forth the following three motions and discussion item:

Motion (Item 243-GV01) updates Chapter VI - Club Sanctioned Games - of the Codification adding Virtual Clubs and ACBL Clubhouse regulations and removing outdated information.

Carried: 13-0-0. Effective: January 1, 2025.

This was mainly just a cleanup.

Motion (243-GV02) removes references to life member/service fees from the Codification. Transitioning life members to regular members will help to standardize the arbitration clause for all members, reducing legal exposure. The elimination of this category of membership will go into effect January 1, 2025.

On consent.

Consent means that all committee members were in favor and no other BOD member wished to remove it for discussion.

Motion (243-GV03) elaborates on the process for nominating and selecting Board members to serve as Executive Committee members.

Carried: 12-0-1. Effective: Immediate.

This was non-controversial. I voted in favor.

Discussion (DI243-GV01) focused on the implementation of an ACBL Board Policy stating that changes to bridge regulations and ACBL operations be discussed with the ACBL Executive Director and the ACBL Board of Directors during its meetings before action(s) are taken. Replacing bridge and ACBL operational-related motions with discussion items fosters collaboration between the Board and Management. This process provides an equitable opportunity for all to engage in discussions and to determine solutions.

Unanimous by straw poll vote. Effective: Immediate.

This process is supposed to provide for a more collaborative process between the BOD and Management.

BYLAWS

Motion (243-BY01) first reading, updates ACBL Bylaws, Article V through Article X that pertain to the election of the ACBL Board of Directors and members of the Advisory Council. Outdated information was eliminated, language was simplified and provisions addressing a vacancy on the Board of Directors were generalized, providing the Board flexibility to proceed with established provisions.

Effective upon ratification of the Advisory Council after the second reading and approval of the Board.

This was mostly clean-up/non-controversial updates. It passed unanimously.

BRIDGE

The Masterpoint Committee submitted a motion for ACBL Board approval amending the Codification to permit five and six player teams that participate in two-session Swiss and

Round Robin events to receive full credit for the overall Masterpoint awards when playing in at least half of the matches.

The Masterpoint Committee believes that this change would attract more client-led teams to regional tournaments, bolster regional attendance and minimize room attrition.

Many of the Board members believe that this proposal would detract from the overall player experience as most who participate in regional team events want to compete against those of their own caliber and to have an increased opportunity to win and to earn Masterpoints.

Failed: 5-8-0.

I felt that this could impact revenue (more 6 person teams – fewer total teams) and was unnecessary (mostly catering to pro teams), so I voted against.

Management solicited Board input on whether to charge entry fees by team instead of by member. The ACBL currently charges entry fees per player for all multi-day NABC/NABC+ team events, applied uniformly regardless of team size or individual playing time. Concerns have been raised, particularly by teams with five or six players, that this structure is inequitable since they pay more but do not receive equal playing time, discouraging teams from fielding additional players.

Management recommended adopting a consistent fee model for these events as a proposed solution: either per player or per team. The proposal aimed to simplify fee structures, ensure fairness and enhance participant satisfaction.

After discussing the pros and cons, a majority of the Board, through a straw poll vote, did not support changing the current fee structure as NABC/NABC+ events are more expensive to run and the proposed change would cost the ACBL \$100,000 per year. If implemented, the increased cost would result in entry fee increases for all members.

Based on Management's estimate of ~\$100K loss of revenue, I voted against this in the straw poll.

ELECTIONS

Rebecca Brown, Region 9, Barbara Heller, Region 6, Darlene Scott, Region 1 and Tim White, Region 13 were certified as having been elected to the ACBL Board of Directors for three-year terms, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2027.

Margot Hennings, Region 4, was elected as ACBL President for a one-year term, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

Cindy Shoemaker, Region 10, was elected as ACBL Vice President for a one-year term, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

David Lodge, Region 11, was elected as ACBL Treasurer for a one-year term, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025.

Lodge was also elected as 401K Trustee for a four-year term, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2028.

Mark Aquino, Region 2, and Richard Beye, former ACBL employee and Tournament Director, were elected to the NABF Board for three-year terms, January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2027.

APPOINTMENTS

Amber Lin, Region 10, was appointed by ACBL Management, and approved by the Board of Directors, as the 2025 ACBL Honorary Member of the Year. Lin was selected for her outstanding work as an ambassador and administrator for US junior bridge.

Sue Manning, District 4, was appointed by the ACBL President, and approved by the ACBL Board of Directors, as the 2025 Nadine Wood Volunteer Member of the Year. As a volunteer, Manning is an integral member of multiple bridge technology teams, contributing to EDGAR (online cheating detection program), Shark Bridge and The Common Game.

Lamya Agelidis, District 22, was nominated by ACBL President Hennings as the Aileen Osofsky ACBL Goodwill Committee Chair for a three-year term, January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2027.

Joan Murdoch, District 22, was recommended by the Aileen Osofsky ACBL Goodwill Committee, and approved by the Board of Directors, as the 2025 Aileen Osofsky Goodwill Member of the Year. Her unwavering support and care for aging and newer players made her an ideal candidate.

Joann Glasson, Region 3, was appointed as the Eastern Zone Executive Committee Member for a three-year term, January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2027.

Jeff Overby, Region 8, was appointed as the Eastern Zone Executive Committee Alternate Member for a three-year term, January 1, 2025 - December 31, 2027.

Larry Sealy, Region 7, was appointed as the Central Zone Executive Committee Member, filling the vacancy for the remainder of the current three-year term that began January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2026.

Dennis Carman, Region 5, was appointed as the Central Zone Executive Committee Alternate, filling the vacancy for the remainder of the current three-year term that began January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2026.