

**SUBJECT: The ACBL UNIT MEMBERSHIP CHAIR HANDBOOK**

The most recent ACBL handbook for Unit Membership Committee Chairs was published in 2013 (Appendix). It was removed from the ACBL website sometime before 2018. No replacement exists.

There are several ways to improve the handbook.

The 2013 edition focuses internally on ACBL work processes and reports. It also treats Units in isolation, missing an opportunity to show how Units, Teachers, and Clubs cooperate to best effect. Worst of all it provides no guidance for effective external focus necessary for finding prospects and retaining new members.

The handbook guides work related to the Unit I/O report. The expectation was that Unit resources would contact inactive and lapsed members and get them to re-instate their membership. It also expected the Membership Committee to lead recruiting new members, but did not provide the committee with any prospects, tools, or leads for such recruiting. Clubs tend not to cooperate with Units as they consider themselves independent. So, the Membership Committee Goal creates an unfunded and unsupported business expectation – lead membership recruiting. I see this expectation as dysfunctional.

**The Role of the Unit Membership Chair**

**GOAL:** The unit membership chair and the unit's membership committee seek new members and encourage present or former members to renew or reinstate their memberships.

Prospect engagement best occurs when teachers and clubs work together to provide instruction and play suitable for their skill level. The recruiting and retention process would be more effective and efficient if Teachers and Club Managers promoted ACBL membership as part of a prospect's introduction to bridge. Clubs and teachers have frequent contact

with prospects and new members.

In contrast, Unit officials have little personal contact with new members, limiting the effectiveness of any Unit communication. Units do receive 11% of any dues renewal. If the ACBL expects those funds to be used for recruiting and retention, it needs to hold Units accountable. Perhaps it is time to eliminate the Unit rebate.

An alternative that will be hard to accomplish would be to have the Unit work with Teaching Clubs and Teaching Centers to create the entry paths to clubs in the unit. Units do not often know what clubs offer supervised play or appropriate (0-10/20/50 MP) Novice Games. The ACBL knows this.

When club managers are active Unit Board Members, there's the potential for conflict of interest. If a Club Manager chairs or is a member of the Membership Committee, how do they participate in decisions to support promoting clubs and classes to prospects and new members? Not all Units have the luxury of Board Members who are disinterested in business outcomes.

Inviting a prospect to take a beginner bridge class is an easy ask.

Inviting a beginner to play at a club game is a difficult ask for a Unit Board member and an easy ask by the Teacher or Club Manager.

What Unit Committees can do is support Teachers and Clubs create members sooner in their process. Even then, Units have no authority and no control.

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**Note:** Monetary references are in U.S. dollars

Effort to reach inactive members and lapsed members belongs to the ACBL and not the Unit. Contacting these people is difficult at best. Units have less contact information than the ACBL does, and people do not answer phone calls from unknown individuals. The do answer phone calls from organizations they are familiar with.

The ACBL laid the responsibility for many Unit Activities at the desk of the Membership chair, even though many tasks had no direct relationship to the recruiting and retention objective. (A Goal by definition is measurable or quantifiable. An objective is an expression of a standard that must be met).

Memberships are no longer handled at the local level. Managing them online is best. The 6 pages on Types of ACBL Membership and Fees is unnecessary. So is the information on Renewals, Reinstatements, and LM Service Fees.

The Cooperative Advertising Program needs updating. We need to add information about recruiting bonuses paid to sponsors (members in good standing who get people to join, not just teachers or club managers).

The ACBL Ranking System is out of place here – while ranks can motivate retention, the Membership Committee should focus on **social fun, partnerships, I/N offerings, and personal accomplishment**, not explaining the rank system. Some things are best left to the website.

### What's Missing

Onboarding a prospect and a new member requires training and socialization. Teachers can provide bridge training and initial socialization by forming a peer group that stays together for their bridge journey. Clubs can help introduce new members to existing members through social events, supervised play, teaching games, social bridge, and leveled competition. An example of leveled competition is "8 is Enough" Swiss Teams where two A players play with 2 C players or 4 B players play as a team. Mentor Programs are a major plus and should be encouraged everywhere. Best Practices for supervised play, mentor programs, and novice games, as well as member social events should guide Membership Committee activities.

Membership Committees can have a major role in recruiting and facilitating the training of new teachers, and identifying new club owners and directors. They can facilitate club director training too.

We found that managing the Medallion Awards was a separate role and manage that away from Membership.

The biggest missing element is business help to promote Unit Activities:

- How to advertise online
- How to advertise in local newspapers
- How to advertise on radio
- Actionable forward-looking business data
- Advertising and promotion ideas and methods

Business skills that drive an external focus are necessary to support attracting prospects and creating players who become new ACBL Members. Social events that create FUN and social integration encourage re-enlisting. The result is retention on autopilot.

### What are best practices?

Who knows – and that’s the problem. We need shared stories that motivate and educate based on real results. We need people willing to spend time influencing business owners to build offerings for new members. Whatever inspires Teachers and Club Managers (and aspiring ones too) to invest energy and create attractive offerings and a pleasant, fun environment is what Units need to encourage.

And we need help when we find teachers who divert students from clubs and or the ACBL, or clubs who discourage rather than encourage ACBL membership. Can these professionals really be in good standing with the ACBL if they are the cause behind slow growth? I do not think so. They damage the ACBL Brand.

### Proposed Framework:

Milestone	Teachers	Clubs	Membership Committee / ACBL
Plan a class	BOOST or the ACBL Marketplace		Promote offerings Help run LBIAD, OLLI, and other entry events Encourage Club-Teacher Collaboration Encourage Membership early. Create Social events to attract players to duplicate Encourage several clubs to work together.
Welcome prospects	Together with clubs Offer Guest Membership	Together with teacher(s)	Welcome prospects to their bridge journey and offer support along the way.
Welcome players		Congratulate first time duplicate players	Congratulate first time duplicate players. Offer option suitable for their level
Complete a class series	Congratulations; Feedback and rating by student	Congratulations; feedback and rating by student	Congratulations and encouragement to continue. Compile feedback and ratings
1 <sup>st</sup> Duplicate game	Congratulations	Congratulations	
First Masterpoints	Congratulations & Celebration	Congratulations & Celebration Offer ACBL Membership	Congratulations and promote the benefits of ACBL membership
New Membership	Celebration	Celebration	Celebration and Publicity (e.g. email or website)
Renewed Membership	Celebration	Celebration	Special Unit Celebration with all members
Bring a new prospect	Welcome	Welcome	Welcome
Sponsor a New Member	Welcome & Congratulations (Bonu\$)	Welcome & Congratulations (Bonu\$)	Recognize top recruiters with Unit Awards

Encourage socialization	Encourage parties	Encourage parties Provide great food experiences.	Advocate I/N game formats Advocate supervised bridge and rubber (party) bridge Advocate 4 is enough and 8 is enough games Run Mentor Programs and Pro-Am Games. Encourage I/N events at area tournaments.
At year 1:	Solicit new member feedback and ratings Solicit friends and family members who might want to learn how to play bridge. What improvements would they make to their first year?		
Special Unit Events			Publicity for Unit Events and Special Game Months Unit-wide social events. Recognize top recruiters
Create New Teachers & Club Managers	Sponsor approved training Mentor candidates Recruit talented people		
Marketing Skills and Resources	Engage training and data	Engage training and data	<a href="#">Best practices for Membership Creation and Retention</a> <a href="#">How to advertise and promote classes and club games</a> <a href="#">How to use the ACBL Marketplace to best effect</a> <a href="#">Marketing messages/appeals</a> <a href="#">Business Data guides growth</a> <a href="#">How to contact members (by topic)</a>

Membership Committees can also play an outsized role in finding partnerships (not game by game partners). They can work closely with the Unit Education Committee to provide paths to duplicate bridge for recent graduates.

Membership Committees cannot function in a vacuum. Teachers and Club Managers are necessary partners. All three need good business data and skills for best results.

Submitted Respectfully,  
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