

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. We need better content, and perhaps a more engaging way to deliver the training (e.g., videos). We must improve both content and deployment.

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. It is devoid of the work appropriate for socializing new members – helping them feel part of a larger bridge community where they live and throughout the ACBL.

The deprecated 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 consider themselves independent of units, and where Units have focused on tournaments and Unit event, the necessary cooperation among clubs and their Unit might be weaker than we need. So, the Membership Committee Goal creates an unfunded and unsupported business expectation – lead membership recruiting. I see this expectation as dysfunctional. Here is the goal from 2013 and a set of objectives to replace it.

The ACBL should express the objectives and allow the Local Units to define their goals:

2013 Membership Committee Handbook	
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 membership.	
Proposed Membership Committee Objectives	Example Goals – Defined by Units Based on resources and context
1)Clubs and Teachers are fully engaged, providing a clear path for their bridge journey,	Number (and Table Count) of social games, supervised play, teacher games, 0-20/50/100/200 games. Attendance by 0-200 MP members.
2)Prospects and new players find FUN, FRIENDSHIP, and COMMUNITY. They are proud to be part of a larger community with shared interests.	Number of social events, games that bridge new players and strong players together (8 is Enough Swiss, 4 is Enough Pairs). Number of volunteers for Unit work. Number of new teacher and new directors. Number of participants in a Mentor Program.
3)Clubs and teachers are identifying prospects, creating new players, and creating new members quickly, and	Number and Time from first contact to first class to first game to first duplicate game, to first masterpoints, to membership to first tournament. ←ACBL do this.
4)Personal contact reinforces efforts to retain current members.	Number of emails and phone calls and contacts with members in a given year.

Instead, consider the steps by which a prospect becomes interested in bridge → learns how to play → makes new friends → starts playing duplicate bridge → earns masterpoints → becomes an ACBL member.

Prospect engagement best occurs when teachers and clubs work together to provide instruction and play suitable for the prospect’s 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. Unit officials don’t.

That Unit officials have little personal contact with new members limits effectiveness of some Unit communication. Interpersonal contact at club games and unit social events is the gold standard.

Units do receive 11% of member 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 justify the Unit rebate with appropriate I/N activities.

An alternative would have the Unit work with Teaching Clubs and Teaching Centers to create a seamless set of offerings to engage and retain novices. Units do not often know what clubs offer supervised play or appropriate (0-10/20/50 MP) Novice Games. A well-functioning Unit Board will cultivate the right relationship with area clubs so that discussions about a prospect’s bridge learning path leads to attractive options.

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 other 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 will be a difficult ask for a Unit Board member unless they have spent the time to develop a sound relationship with all club managers in the Unit, and are acquainted with the prospects. Note, this is an easy ask by the Teacher or Club Manager. What can Unit Committees do? They can support Teachers and Clubs who create members and help them do so sooner in their process. Do MORE, SOONER. Even then, Units have no authority and no control over what Teachers and Clubs choose to do.

← Comments on 2013 Content

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. These days with concern about spam calls, people do not answer phone calls from unknown individuals. They do answer phone calls from an organization 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 result. 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.

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Note: Monetary references are in U.S. dollars

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). We also need to support Teachers and Club Managers that want to advertise online. Consider ways to share prospect contacts so that teachers and clubs can effectively offer options over time.

The ACBL Ranking System is out of place – rankings have little to do with prospect and new member recruiting and retention.

Contacting Your Members needs modernization to update content (suggested text) and media choice – email, postcard, ads, social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and more).

What's Missing

Onboarding a prospect and a new member requires **training** and **socialization**. Both require **communication** and **outreach**. Teachers can provide bridge training and initial socialization by forming a peer group that stays together for their bridge journey. Clubs and Units 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** (and **“4 is Enough Pairs**) 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 with clubs. The key is to have the next step readily available when the novice is ready.

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.

(Aside: We found that managing the Medallion Awards was a separate role and best managed away from Membership. This required a single focus and simple execution).

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

- How to advertise online
- What can social media do for a teacher and club?
- How to advertise in local newspapers
- How to advertise on radio
- How to use press releases
- Actionable forward-looking business data
- Advertising and promotion ideas and methods
- Who are my most valuable players and are they at risk of not renewing?

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 INTERACTION** encourage re-enlisting. The result is retention on autopilot.

What are best practices?

Who knows – and that’s the problem. Having curated examples that grow over time would keep ideas fresh. 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. We need Teachers and Club Owners who continually update/refresh their offerings to I/N players. The more teachers and clubs discover new ideas and own them the more committed they will be to the work and the desired results.

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.

There are many small clubs that attend to the games their players play, with no intention to recruit new players. These clubs are valuable to their clients, and much less valuable to the ACBL as a whole. Membership Committees do well to avoid investing effort with these enterprises.

Proposed Framework:

Milestone	Teachers	Clubs	Membership Committee / ACBL
Plan a class; Find Prospects	BOOST or the ACBL Marketplace		Promote offerings Curate outdated information
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	Offer Teaching Games Teach to Duplicate	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 Offer ACBL Membership
1 st Duplicate game	Congratulations	Congratulations Offer ACBL Membership	
First Masterpoints	Congratulations & Celebration	Congratulations & Celebration Offer ACBL Membership	Congratulations and promote the benefits of ACBL membership ACBL can provide a prompt to the Unit.
New Membership	Celebration	Celebration	Celebration and Publicity (e.g., email or website) ACBL can provide a prompt to the Unit.
Renewed Membership	Celebration	Celebration	Special Unit Celebration with all members ACBL can provide a prompt to the Unit.
Bring a new prospect	Welcome	Welcome	Welcome
Sponsor a New Member	Welcome & Congratulations (Bonu\$)	Welcome & Congratulations (Bonu\$)	Consider recognizing top recruiters with Unit Awards ACBL can provide a prompt to the Unit.
At year 1:	Solicit new member feedback and ratings using a vetted questionnaire (ACBL) 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	Units support club-teacher collaboration for teaching prospects and creating players and members.		Publicity for Club and Unit Events and Special Game Months Unit-wide social events at clubs.
Create New Teachers & Club Managers			Sponsor approved training Recruit talented people Mentor candidates
Marketing Skills and Resources	Engage training and data Club Manager Dashboard	Engage training and data Teacher Dashboard (Prospects; Intermediates, etc.)	Best practices for Membership Creation and Retention How to advertise and promote classes and club games How to use the ACBL Marketplace to best effect Marketing messages/appeals Business Data guides growth How to contact members (by topic)

Membership Committees play an outsized role in helping players create sustainable partnerships (not game by game partners – clubs do that well). They work closely with the Unit Education Committee to provide paths to duplicate bridge for recent graduates. Membership Committees do not function in a vacuum. Teachers and Club Managers are necessary partners. All three need meaningful business data and skills for best results.

Submitted Respectfully,
Steve Moese K082411

APPENDIX

Membership Committees – Guide for Recruiting and Retention

Do you have a well-staffed, hard working Membership Committee with skilled gregarious Committee Chair and plentiful outgoing volunteers? If not, you might want to start now.

The Membership Committee - You will want to recruit people who are fun to be with, have great poise and interpersonal skills, and are willing to do the social connection work you choose for your Unit. The resulting committee needs a rational set of objectives and sufficient resources to make them attainable. A membership role can be a great place for a Unit's newer members to volunteer for the first time. They will be closer to the needs and feelings of the majority of our members – Non-Life Masters and I/N players.

Communication – we strongly urge Unit Boards, Membership Committees, and Clubs (and beginning bridge teachers) to meet periodically to discuss what's working and what needs attention. Success depends on cooperation, support, and agreement to roles, resources, and priorities. Working together, Units, Teachers, and Clubs have direct impact on how well members feel joined to their bridge clubs and the ACBL.

Suggestions - The following outline prompts Unit Membership Committees to use their skills, resources, ingenuity and creativity to make playing bridge as attractive as possible for everyone. Note that we ask questions rather than specify any given activity. Its up to your Board and your Membership Committee to decide what makes sense for your area. This list is meant to suggest ideas for units of all sizes. Not every activity will be appropriate. What you choose will be based on your capacity, capability and available volunteers.

One watchout – be sure that the Membership Committee and the Education Committee are not overlapping their efforts. The Board of Directors should make the remit clear for both committees so that the sum of their combined work is greater than the two alone.

We start at the beginning of a typical new player's journey. A prospect becomes interested in bridge → learns how to play → makes new friends → starts playing duplicate bridge → earns masterpoints → becomes an ACBL member.

Here are some guides to consider as you develop the work plan for your Membership Committee.

In the Beginning

1. Do you have robust ways to communicate with members and the community at large? Websites and social media accounts?
2. Have you reached out to churches, synagogues, community centers and libraries to meet people who might be interested in learning how to play bridge (prospects)?
3. Do you have social events meant to attract new people to the bridge clubs or bridge center in your unit?
4. Do you celebrate Learn Bridge In A Day Events? Do you encourage clubs and teachers to use BOOST to recruit more prospects? DO you have a presence in the local Osher Lifelong Learning program (OLLI)?
5. Do you actively encourage members in your Unit to bring new prospects to bridge classes?
6. Do you have sufficient teachers skilled in teaching beginners? Are they working closely with one or more clubs?
7. Do you celebrate your best recruiters for the number of new players they create and the number of new members that they sponsor?
8. Do clubs in your unit have a clear-cut path for new recruits to follow: a) to become new players, and b) to become members?
9. Do you have an after-school program, a college program, or a working professionals program that caters to the needs of these groups? Do you actively recruit new club owners, directors, and recruiters? Do you encourage young players (18+ yrs. old) to become bridge teachers (to their peers)? Do you encourage young people to become club managers and to attract their peers to the game?

10. Do you encourage teachers to teach using best practices, both in person and online?
11. Do you encourage your current teachers and club managers to use all of the available support from the ACBL?
12. Do you create a welcoming environment for prospects and new players at the bridge center or clubs in your Unit?
 - a. Do you encourage Board members, teachers, club managers, and members to reach out and welcome new players?
 - b. Do you offer a new member a free play or other trial gift to encourage them to play in the Unit?
 - c. Do you have a small group of people who manage welcome notes?
 - d. Do you have a process to recognize a new player's first masterpoints? First win? First open game? Any rank changes?
 - e. Do you celebrate new players and new members on a club, teacher's or unit's website?
 - f. Is it easy for new players to find and meet peers? To find compatible partners for club games? For tournaments?
13. Do you have a way to communicate with new players/members to keep them engaged and interested in what's next? (NLM Newsletter, website pages, personally bridge journey maps, and more).
14. Do you encourage Clubs and Teachers to have a rich program that draws prospects forward into playing bridge with their peers, playing bridge at the clubs, and learning to enjoy the kinds of fun possible in duplicate bridge?
 - a. Do you assess the offerings to ensure that they are sufficient to keep newer players playing at least once a week?
15. Do you help prospects find:
 - a. Peers to play with?
 - b. A comfortable group of (peer) friends who can share their bridge fun?
 - c. Mentors to learn with?
 - d. Games to play where fun is the focus?
 - e. Teachers know to motivate players to play and learn at the same time?
 - f. Learning plans consistent with their goals and abilities?
 - g. A bridge library they can borrow from?
 - h. A guide to learning opportunities beyond classes and events at clubs?
 - i. An introduction to rubber bridge?
 - j. An introduction to duplicate bridge?
 - k. An introduction to special Unit games?
 - l. An introduction to grass roots events (NAP & GNT)?
 - m. An introduction to sectional tournaments?
 - n. An introduction to Regional Tournaments?
 - o. An introduction to NABC Tournaments?
 - p. An introduction to online play (BBO, RealBridge, Swan, among others)
16. Do you encourage clubs in your unit to offer evening games for working professionals and students?
17. Do you encourage club managers to use online virtual club games to fill gaps in offerings to all interested in playing bridge?
18. Do you actively engage members to help them make the games that they play in as friendly and full of fun possible?
19. Do you work with clubs to help them improve their offerings and make them attractive places to play?
20. Do you recognize club owners and teachers who are successful at recruiting new players and creating new members?
21. Do you have an active membership committee doing the hard work to maintain the social fabric that keeps bridge healthy in your unit?
22. Do you have clear objectives for recruiting and retention for this year and next?
23. Do you encourage clubs and teachers to invest their own resources to reach prospects and to create new players?
24. Do you support teachers and teaching clubs with cards, books, free plays, and other tangible help that appeal to prospects and new players?

25. Do you check in periodically with your I/N Players to identify what is working and what is not? What improvements are needed?
26. Do you celebrate:
 - a. When a new member joins?
 - b. When an existing member extends their membership?
 - c. When a lapsed member returns to membership?
 - d. When a new class of beginners starts?
27. Do you celebrate annual accomplishments by all members (Medallion Game, Unit Awards, etc.)?
28. Do you take photographs of celebrations and record the fun on your website or social media page to record the fun and attract others with interest?
29. Do you provide an I/N ladder (club game results), or a frequency of play bar chart, or a number of classes bar chart, to help I/N players and regular members all see what progress everyone is making?

IMPORTANT – If you find something unique that attracts people, holds their attention, and engages them to play weekly, please take the time to share it with your Unit and with Other Units in your area. The more we all use great ideas, the better results we will find.

The Middle

1. Do you have information sessions to encourage I/N players to expand their bridge journey?
2. Do you hold social events that allow members of all experience levels to meet socially in a friendly, supportive environment?
3. Do you recognize rank promotions and other bridge accomplishments publicly to motivate all to play more bridge?
4. What do you do to help existing members feel welcomed and valued in your Unit or club?
5. Do you assist clubs experiencing a player attitude problem (negativity, unpleasantness, arguments at the table, intimidation, and more) with ways to address them and change to a positive environment?
6. Do you provide opportunities for I/N players to become familiar with bridge ethics, rules, and regulations? Do you do this in a friendly, non-threatening way?
7. Do you help I/N players expand their set of potential partners? Do you encourage clubs to offer games that cause players to play with people other than their current partners?
8. Do you maintain frequent contact with club players?
9. Do you reach out to members who are not playing their “fair share” of club games and entice them to attend?
10. Do you encourage players with transportation or mobility challenges to play online? Do you help members find online partners?
11. Do you monitor the attitude of your I/N Members regularly? Do they have ways to tell you how to make things better for them?
12. Do clubs use the internet and social media to communicate with members and share the fun?
13. Does the Unit have a communication team working on press releases for local community news outlets?

Repeat

1. Do you and clubs in your Unit actively encourage players to renew their membership to the ACBL? Do you do this with a personal touch?
2. Do you know who your heavy users are? Do you know who your light users are? Which of these two groups might be more interested in playing more?
3. Do you seek to understand why a current member might be choosing to lapse their membership? Do you have ways to mitigate their concerns?
4. When there is conflict in a club or Unit game between players or between a player and a director, do you have a way to lower tensions and get the parties working together again?
5. Do you have a way to help experienced bridge players hone their emotional skills?

6. Do you offer lapsed members an incentive to return to cub play in your unit?
7. Do you monitor the attitude of LM+ Members to help improve their bridge experience?
8. When a member greatly reduces their play rate, do you reach out to them to understand why?
9. When a member suffers a major illness, do you have a sunshine team to wish them well and send a card or small gift to brighten their day and hasten their recovery?
10. When a member dies,
 - a. Do you have a way to recognize their death and their contributions to the Unit?
 - b. Do you send sympathy cards and flowers to their loved ones?
 - c. Or, make a charitable donation in their name?
 - d. Do you advise the ACBL on the death of a member?
11. Do you have clear plans for recruiting new volunteers early so that they can learn the ropes from the incumbents?
12. Do you have clear succession plans, including identifying people who can join the Board of Directors?
13. Are Board Members and Membership Committee members skilled in handling membership complaints?
14. Do you follow-up with members who provide improvement ideas and issues for resolution?
15. Do you have regular membership meetings and show progress on proposals brought by members in attendance?

UNIT WORK

The ACBL currently published the In and Out Report. Please see the old membership committee guidebook for details. What work does this report drive in the Board of Directors and the Membership committee?

The ACBL also publishes a quarterly QUIP report that shows recent past results for new member recruiting and retention. What work does this report drive in the Board of Directors and the Membership committee?

Do you have a process by which members of the Unit Board understand and use these reports to improve your results?

Not all members are a valuable as others. Do you know who plays more frequently at your tournaments? At area clubs? Online? What steps do you take to prompt members who are not playing very often to come and play? Do clubs do this routinely?

UNIT GAMES

1. Do you encourage all clubs to engage in all UNIT and ACBL-Wide Games offered in a given year?
2. Do you encourage clubs to offer a full menu of special games during the calendar year?
3. Do you encourage clubs to manage their schedule during area tournaments to satisfy the desires of their players?
4. Do you run a full slate of Sectional Tournaments for your unit consistent with your District's guidelines?
5. Do clubs run ACBL-wide events for members?
6. Do you have an active Charity Chair that helps run events for ACBL-wide and local benefit? How are they connected with the Membership Committee?

Some examples of select ideas follow. In an era of increasing digital interaction, John McDonnell offers a great overview: [How to Offer a High-Touch Experience in a High-Tech World](#), Forbes, 23 July 2018. As bridge enjoys increasing attention online, there is an even greater need for high-touch experiences among all members. Well run clubs and Units know how to serve this need – a need that online play can never touch.

For assistance and suggestions beyond this guide, contact your Unit Membership Resource at ACBL memberservices@acbl.org