



American Contract
Bridge League

Strategic Committee
September 17, 2020



Membership Growth – A Strategic Imperative

ACBL has had a membership growth goal for decades. Overall, we've cycled since a peak of 191,000 in 1991 and are currently around 162,000. The last concerted growth effort took place with the Unit Growth Seminars and Zero Tolerance Policy early in this century. In addition, retirement of “baby boomers” spurred both population and ACBL growth.

The current decline started in 2013 when tournament attendance and new member recruitment peaked. In 2015, face-to-face club play and the 2 -year new member retention peaked and significant membership decline began in 2017.

As we update our Strategic plan, I believe now is the time not only for another concerted effort, but also for fundamental change or we'll see cycles continue with lower peaks and deeper valleys.

Long Term Growth Optimism

- Population growth in the U.S. and Canada expected to add 115 million people by 2050 with an increase in seniors of 35 million people
- ACBL Educational Foundation survey found that:
 - About 15 million Americans age 45 and over know how to play bridge, and about 5 million of them play at least a few times year. About 2 million of those play at least once a month.
 - Among those who don't know how to play, almost one out of five said they are interested in learning – a whopping 11 million people.
- Potential improvement from adopting successful marketing and membership practices which can be replicated across the organization
- Significant advances in online technology for learning, teaching and playing bridge provides new tools

Prior to the Pandemic

- Membership declining – 2000 members in 2019 about 1%/yr. since 2017
 - New member recruitment declines from 11,703 in 2013 to 10,264 in 2019
 - New member retention declines from 61.75% in 2015 to 56.74% in 2019
 - Temporary membership did not help
 - Average age continues to rise
- Club tables have declined
 - Face-to face peaked in 2015
 - Online peaked in 2017, but increased in 2019 vs 2018
- Tournaments continue to decline from 2013 peak

Forecast of membership by David Rodney

Assuming current patterns of recruiting of new members continue:

- ACBL membership will decline to roughly 148,000 by 2024
 - ACBL membership was 167,000 at the end of 2018
- The average age of ACBL members will be roughly 74.4 years in 2024
 - Average age was 72.5 years at the end of 2018
- These trends will continue until ACBL membership stabilizes at a much smaller size 10-15 years from now
- It is clear from the membership forecasts that tournament sizes will continue to fall



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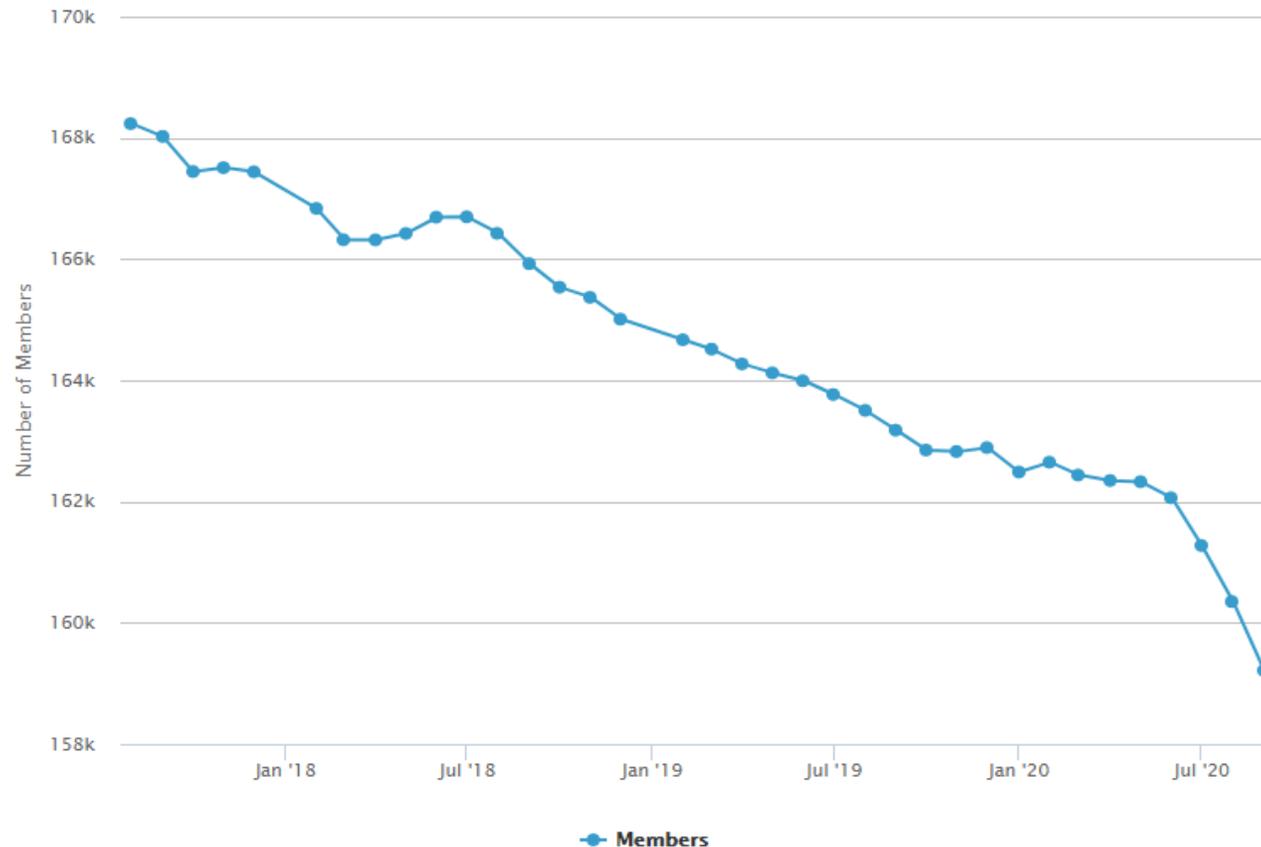
Current Membership Trends

District:

All Districts

Membership for past 36 months for ACBL

Click and drag to zoom in. On mobile devices, pinch to zoom.



1%/year decline from August 2017 to Jan 2020.

The decline has accelerated to 7%/year from June 1 to September 1.

If membership declines at the current rate, July 1, 2021 we'll be at 150,000 members.

Increased decline rate is caused by decreased new members and increasing membership lapse.

Still <50% of members who played in club games last year are playing in online ACBL games

Critical Components

The following critical components to a solution to these issues:

- Alignment of our organizational structure to address the membership growth imperative
- Additional resources at all levels dedicated to improvement
- Data collection, analysis and data driven decisions to focus resources to the most cost- effective programs to increase recruitment and retention
- Determining “best practices” and documenting their each implementation step and measurements so they can be replicated at the local level
- Creation of a culture of continuous improvement

Asset Approach from Northwestern Univ.

The Asset Approach was recommended by Sharon in our last meeting. I believe it has merit for our work since our primary goal is equipping and energizing work at the local level while providing a framework for continuous improvement based upon performance data and replication of successful practices.

ASSET APPROACH	NEEDS APPROACH
Focus on production (What do you want to build?)	Focus on needs or problem (What's the problem?)
Assess capacities	Needs assessment
Develop networks/associations	Build service system
Internal development responsibility (self)	External development responsibility (customer)
Production responsibility	Problem solving authority
Side-by-side partners	Consumers/staff/experts
Local problem solving	Professional service

Strategic Planning Discussion Aug 5

- Board needs to set the objectives for the plan
- Management is responsible for developing action plans, budget and implementation
- When approved by the Board, there should be alignment on the objectives, a defined timeline for implementation, and agreed measures to determine success and drive mid-course corrections
- Within these principles:
 - Iterative plan development builds alignment and commitment
 - Utilize expertise
 - Good ideas can come from a variety of sources
 - Data based decisions on programs and actions to build on successful practices
 - An “Asset Based Approach” to enlist local commitment to the plan

Strategic Planning Discussion Aug 5

- Membership Growth
 - Recruiting more new members
 - Improving membership retention
- Tournaments
 - Clear that we have too many regionals
 - Need to find a way to reduce allocation to districts to avoid severe financial impacts
- Integration of the recommendations of the Online Task Force
- Financial Stability
 - Achieving the objectives will require additional funding to drive the changes
 - Clear timeline and phased funding as milestones are met



Potential Tactics for Growth

- **Increase new member recruitment by xx%/annum from January 1, 202x**
- **Potential actions:**
 - Focus on additional partnerships with organizations that have common objectives. For example: YMCA, Jewish Community Centers, Country Clubs, Sports Clubs, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, ACBL Educational Foundation etc.
 - Increase social media presence
 - Assist teachers and clubs by understanding successful practice for introducing people to bridge and providing materials to successfully replicate them as they are our **sales force**
 - Consider a “social bridge” membership with a strong value proposition for them
 - Continue recruiting incentives
- **Increase two-year membership retention to xx% from by 2024** (16-27 month was 52.74% 1/1/20 versus 61.40% 1/1/19)
- **Potential actions:**
 - Develop a data driven approach to understanding why members remain in ACBL and why others leave. From this develop successful practices that can be replicated across units and districts
 - Tie member dues rebates to units to performance metrics for recruiting and retention

Recommendation

The Strategic Committee recommends that the Board assign the following action item to Management:

- Develop a comprehensive 3 to 5-year plan to increase new member recruitment and member retention to slow the current membership decline and then to grow membership in the ACBL.
- The finished plan should accomplish alignment of the entire organization of ACBL to address membership issues. The Board recognizes that more resources will be required throughout the organization to be successful. It will also identify numerical targets for each time period as well as metrics for specific activities.