



Handbook for Intermediate/ Newcomer (I/N) Coordinators

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Introduction

Congratulations on your appointment as the unit's Intermediate/Newcomer (I/N) Coordinator.

Your job is an extremely important one because you will be working with the largest segment of ACBL's members. Did you know that more than 65% of ACBL members have fewer than 500 masterpoints?

When ACBL developed the position of I/N Coordinator, the intention was to designate someone in the unit who would focus on integrating students and new players into the local bridge family.

The primary tool for doing this is the availability of games that are appropriate for newer players. Units are encouraged to run I/N sectionals (or to work with club managers when the unit delegates this privilege to a club) and to develop I/N programs for all unit sectionals. This is what you will be doing for your unit.

To help in your new position, the ACBL has compiled this handbook of suggestions and ideas. Please give us a call in the Marketing Department (662-253-3112) or contact us by email (marketing@acbl.org) if you have questions or if we can be of assistance to you.

The Role of the Intermediate/Newcomer Coordinator

The unit's Intermediate/Newcomer (I/N) Coordinator position was created by the ACBL Board of Directors to assist units in making new players a part of the local bridge family and to increase the participation of these new players by providing newcomer games and activities. The I/N Coordinator reports directly to the unit board.

The I/N Coordinator should be available to assist clubs that want to establish an I/N program. The coordinator should serve as Tournament Chair for the unit's I/N sectionals, work with clubs running I/N sectionals that have been delegated to them by the unit and work with the unit's Tournament Chair to offer I/N programs at all of the unit's sectional tournaments (and regional tournaments within the unit's jurisdiction).

If the unit has a Unit Educational Liaison (UEL), an Education Committee, bridge teachers offering lessons, a New Player Services program, a mentoring program, etc., the I/N Coordinator will find it much easier to offer I/N sectionals and programs and for them to be successful. If these pieces of the puzzle are NOT in place, or if the I/N Coordinator and the UEL are the same person, the job of the I/N Coordinator can be more difficult. However, the I/N Coordinator should always be a member of the unit's Education Committee.

The I/N Coordinator's main focus is on creating and expanding the unit's I/N program. The UEL's main role is to make the unit aware of programs that the ACBL has made available to encourage participation and membership. The UEL works with the unit to establish some or all of those programs (e.g., TAP, mentoring, New Player Services, etc.).

In a small unit, the I/N Coordinator can do most of the organizational work alone. If you are the I/N Coordinator for a large unit, you will need a committee to work with you. Appoint someone to represent each major city or area with the unit's jurisdiction.

Teachers, directors, club managers and new players are the best candidates for your team. Remember, no one person, no matter how committed and talented, could expect to effectively handle either the job of I/N Coordinator or the job of UEL without help.

The ACBL I/N Program

The I/N program is the name given to selected bridge activities organized and run by a group (unit, district, club) that wants to encourage newer bridge players to participate. I/N activities can be restricted to any group(s) of non-Life Master players (<500).

Elements of the I/N program are:

1. Games for 299er, 199er, 99er, 49er, 0-20 and 0-5 players each session

Offer all of these events. A notation, “may be stratified at the director’s discretion,” should appear on all advertising. This allows the director to set up strats that will best balance the players in attendance and will award the most masterpoints possible. (A game may be stratified, but any group of three or more newcomer tables should be run as a separate event.)

2. Directors who are experienced in working with newcomers

Running games for new players requires a combination of public relations and directing skills. ACBL has trained a number of tournament directors to work with new players. They are referred to as I/N specialists. ACBL will assign one of these directors to your tournament on request. Any club director can gain more experience in working with new players by spending one or more sessions with the directors of the I/N program at any NABC.

3. A special area or room for I/N games

A special room is desirable but often not available. I/N Coordinators can make a corner of the room the special area for new players. This allows the players to maximize the benefits of participating in an I/N program. If a separate room is used, the games should be close to the rest of the tournament so the new players will feel like a part of the whole.

4. Celebrity speakers to give bridge tips before the games

Start each session with a special speaker lecturing for 20 to 30 minutes. Speakers who can entertain and give bridge tips on the level of the new players are best for this program. If the topic is too advanced, the speaker will do more harm than good.

5. Social events

Social events give the players a better chance to interact with other newcomers. Bridge Bingo, juke-box dancing, a wine and cheese party, a between-sessions dinner buffet, a hospitality room where new players can meet the local stars and bridge officials, a panel show and a pizza party are popular social events.

6. Fliers to invite the players and guarantee partners

Mail fliers to the eligible players in the area and invite them to attend. Advertise that partners are guaranteed for anyone who arrives one hour before game time. Arrange for a standby pair. Mailing labels can be ordered from listlabel@acbl.org or produced from your unit’s own database by the Unit Electronic Contact. (See the [ACBL Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Use](#)).

7. New Players Services (NPS)

Have a volunteer sit at the Hospitality Desk to assist the new players as needed with questions and information. Have committee members walk around the I/N area to visit with the players, pass out candy and go from table to table wishing the players good luck in the game to follow. Have volunteers available after each session to help the players interpret the scores. These are services that would be performed by the committee members of a unit NPS program.

8. Trophies for overall wins

New players love to win trophies. The trophies can be regular trophies, glasses, mugs, etc. New players like prizes that say “First Place Winner.”

9. Pictures of the winners

Take photos of the winners and display them. Players love to see who has won in the “Winner’s Circle.”

I/N Tournament or I/N Program at a Tournament

- ♣ I/N sectionals, I/N regionals and I/N programs are planned for players who are either new to duplicate or new to bridge. I/N sectionals and I/N regionals stand alone; I/N programs are run as part of a regular sectional or regional tournament.
- ♣ I/N sectionals, I/N regionals and I/N programs are held as a means of creating a new player program or expanding one that is already in place. They are unlikely to be successful unless the host unit, local clubs and surrounding units have already made an effort to develop an active group of bridge students and new players.
- ♣ I/N tournaments and programs offer a pool of congenial partners, a suitable place to play, events in every session that intermediate and newcomer players can win and a lot of fun. The format of each contains all of the elements previously listed.
- ♣ A unit can run its own I/N tournaments, or it can give one or more I/N sectional sanctions to a club under its jurisdiction. An I/N sectional sponsored by a unit should be organized to attract players from a larger area, whereas one run by a club may attract only local players and should be organized accordingly.
- ♣ I/N sectionals must be at least one day and no more than five days in duration. An I/N sectional is defined as a sectional with a masterpoint limit of no more than 500. There is no limit to the number of I/N sectionals a unit may hold; however, a unit may not schedule more than three one-day I/N sectionals in any calendar year.
- ♣ Each district is entitled to conduct one 0-199er regional, one 0-299er regional, one non-Life Master regional or one non-Life Master regional with an upper limit of 500 masterpoints that runs from two to six days in length each calendar year. These regionals can be held concurrently with an open sectional or a senior regional. A district may allow a unit to conduct its I/N regional.
- ♣ A unit can run its own I/N tournaments, or it can give one or more I/N sectional sanctions to a club under its jurisdiction. An I/N sectional sponsored by a unit should be organized to attract players from a larger area, whereas one run by a club may attract only local players and should be organized accordingly.

I/N Tournament or I/N Program at a Tournament *Cont.*

- ♣ An I/N program can be held in conjunction with any sectional or regional tournament and does not require a separate sanction. The I/N program schedule would be advertised along with the events for the sectional or regional tournament.
- ♣ Planning and running I/N tournaments and programs tends to infuse unit members with new vitality by giving them an exciting project to work on as a team.

I/N Program for Unit and/or Club Games

Many of the I/N activities can be offered in conjunction with a local unit or club game.

- ♠ **Schedule and promote games** – It's most important to advertise the game as limited to a certain number of masterpoints (0 to 5, 0 to 20, 0 to 49, 0 to 99, 0 to 199), so the newcomers will feel welcome and know there is a game for them. Newer players won't come if you don't invite them. Advertise all of these levels and stratify if necessary.
- ♠ **Encourage learning** – Arrange for local bridge "stars" and teachers to give a bridge tip before the start of all games.
- ♠ **Give prizes** – If the games are small, offer an opportunity to collect points (or credits or Bridge Bucks) that can be redeemed for prizes when a certain number have been earned. The awards don't have to be fancy. They have to be something that shows the player is a "winner."
- ♠ **Guarantee partners** – In order to guarantee partners for anyone who arrives an hour before game time, give a free play to any player who stands by and doesn't get to play. Organize a Partnership Committee to call the regular newcomers and arrange partnerships.
- ♠ **Help your players get to know each other** – Your social activities don't have to be fancy, just fun. Anything that will help the players get to know each other better will result in their making partnerships and having a good time.
- ♠ **Help your players bond** – Holding the newcomer game on a night when there isn't an open game will give the players a better chance to bond and get to know one another.



Getting Started

Now that you know the elements of the I/N program, it is a good idea to find out what your unit already has in place.

Checklist

You should meet with the unit's previous I/N Coordinator to discuss what has been done and what has been tried prior to your taking over the job. Here is a checklist to use to determine what I/N activities are in place within the unit. If your unit includes a number of different areas or major cities, use the checklist for each.

- ☐ Does the unit have a Unit Education Liaison?
- ☐ Are there teachers regularly offering bridge classes?
- ☐ Are there games for newer players being offered by teachers?
- ☐ Are there games for newer players being offered by clubs?
 - ☐ BridgePlus+
 - ☐ Supervised play
 - ☐ Easybridge!
 - ☐ 0-5 newcomer games
 - ☐ Other limited masterpoint games
- ☐ Does the unit sponsor one or more I/N sectionals? (I/N sectional sanctions can be given to a club.)
- ☐ Are there newcomer games and I/N activities at local sectionals?
- ☐ Has the unit established a New Player Services program?
- ☐ Does the unit have an Education Committee?
- ☐ Is there a mentoring program in place?

If the unit has little in place, below are some suggestions, ideas and ways to reach out to the bridge community to get an I/N program started or reinvigorated.

Bridge Classes/Teachers

If there aren't teachers regularly offering bridge classes, talk with the UEL about asking the unit to sponsor a Teacher Accreditation Program (TAP). In a small unit, it might be more practical to subsidize one or more people to attend a TAP at a nearby location. Teachers are the main source of new players, and your unit can't be regularly infused with new members without this resource.

If there are teachers offering lessons regularly in your area. Schedule a meeting with them to find out how you can help them get their students playing in local games. The teacher knows that students who play and practice what they have learned are more likely to want more lessons, and they should be happy to meet with you.

Here are a few topics to cover when you meet with the teachers:

1. Would one or more of the teachers be interested in running a [BridgePlus+](#) game? If so, do they need an inexpensive site to do this, or is a local club site available?
2. Would the teachers be receptive to some of the ways the unit can help?

Some things the unit can do are:

- ♥ Send students a congratulatory letter and certificate after completing a course to introduce the unit and the ACBL.
- ♥ Establish a limited masterpoint game to run concurrently with the unit game.
- ♥ Give graduates a free play to a limited masterpoint game.
- ♥ Host a party once a year to welcome new players.
- ♥ Develop a mentoring program.
- ♥ Run an I/N sectional to introduce new players to the special activities for people who are new to duplicate bridge.
- ♥ Offer an I/N program at a regular unit sectional tournament.

3. Ask for other ideas on how the unit can work with and help the teachers.

Note: The I/N Coordinator would be responsible for I/N sectionals, an I/N program at a sectional or regional and newcomer games with the unit game. Other items listed above would be handled primarily by the unit's UEL.

Clubs

Although you work for the unit, clubs may be happy to have you help them set up an I/N program and to work with them to get teachers to bring their students in to play. It is probably best to meet individually with each person who runs a club game to see how the unit can help expand each club manager's business.

Clubs run the gamut from full time (games every afternoon and evening during the week) to single sessions run in rented rooms in a variety of facilities. Many features of an I/N program can be offered in conjunction with local club games to encourage participation.

If your area has a full-time club or a clubhouse where a number of different club managers run their games, you should probably focus your attention there.

Here are a few selected tips from ACBL's [Club Managers' Handbook](#) that you can consider discussing with your local club managers:

- ♦ **Remember to get the word out.** The world's greatest club is worthless if prospective players don't know about it. Consequently, promotion makes things happen and produces fast results.
- ♦ **Create a new players' welcome packet.** Once new players start going to club games, make them excited about the club and eager to return. Create a welcome packet for newcomers. It could include the following information:
 - ☐ A welcome letter from the club owner or director,
 - ☐ Unit calendar of events and/or club calendar of events,
 - ☐ Information on your mentoring program,
 - ☐ An upcoming tournament flier,
 - ☐ A free play and an ACBL duplicate instant scorer,
 - ☐ An invitation to a welcome party (special bridge game and luncheon),
 - ☐ Flier for an upcoming NABC,
 - ☐ Pamphlets on bidding, defense or bridge etiquette,
 - ☐ List of players at your club (or club or unit directory),
 - ☐ A brochure on the basics of duplicate bridge ("[Welcome to the World of Duplicate](#)").
- ♦ **Provide free plays for teachers to give to graduating students.** Ask teachers to bring their students with them to the club and provide free plays for the students. During the game, publicly thank the teachers for bringing the new players. The students will appreciate hearing their teacher get praise.
- ♦ **Run [Bridge Plus+](#) with a teacher.** Offer a supervised play session to help get students used to coming to the club to play.

Getting Started *Cont.*

- ♦ **Offer limited masterpoint games.** Recognize that the area needs newcomer games to prosper. About 60% of all ACBL members have fewer than 300 masterpoints; 40% have under 100 points. To successfully serve the bridge-playing population in your area, you need to offer games for new players and players who are new to duplicate.
- ♦ **Give a 15-minute pre-game bridge tip.** Start your beginner games with a tip. This will warm the students up and be an incentive to come out to play. Organize a group of teachers and local bridge celebrities to offer a bridge tip prior to any limited masterpoint game.
- ♦ **Offer a variety of newcomer games.** New players and players new to duplicate need venues to play in that are NOT the open game. Provide as many avenues for growth, or “stepping stones,” as you can. Each game offers a greater challenge for the new player.

Advertise games for 199ers, 99ers, 49ers, 0-20 and 0- 5 players. A newcomer game can be stratified when there aren’t enough players, but the newer players won’t come to play if they don’t feel there is a place for them.

- ♦ **Start an Easybridge! game.** [Easybridge!](http://www.Easybridge.com) is an outstanding marketing device designed to attract new players to the club and to get them playing in a game that carries them through the learning stages into “real” duplicate bridge. For more information, go to www.Easybridge.com.
- ♦ **Offer lessons at the same time as a newcomer game.** Invite a teacher to give a series of lessons at the club. If you offer a newcomer game at the same time, the students can move to the game the week following the end of the classes. They will already be used to coming to the club at this time. Get them started with a free play for their first session and then make certain they have a good time.
- ♦ **Call new players.** Once a new player has come to the club, organize a committee to contact them and make partnerships for future games. A phone call will let the caller know if the playing experience was a good one or if a problem could be resolved.
- ♦ **Guarantee partners.** Guarantee partners for your players, especially the newcomers. Set up a program where you have a club member stand by at each game in case you pair up all but one person. Reward the club member when that person doesn’t get to play with a “free play” for another game. New players are more likely to come to your games if they are certain they will get a partner and get to play.
- ♦ **Have a volunteer host.** Have a game hostess (perhaps the teacher of some of the participating newcomers) to help welcome the players and to answer questions. If the unit has a New Player Services program, a member of this committee would welcome the opportunity. Ask the club manager to reward the volunteer host with a free play.
- ♦ **Host a party for unit recognition of newcomer achievements.** Have the unit recognize the achievement of new players when they complete their first bridge course. Because these students are potential new unit members, the unit provides a congratulatory letter and a copy of “[Welcome to the World of Duplicate](#)” (which can be ordered free of charge from the [ACBL Resource Center](#)). If your unit adopts this program (check with your unit’s Membership Chair), you can invite a unit official to make these presentations at a local club. Follow the festivities with a special introductory game for masterpoints. Include refreshments and be sure to give out masterpoint receipts to all of the winners. This type of event will bring new players into a club. If they are made to feel welcome and comfortable, they will return.

Getting Started *Cont.*

- ♦ **Make the simplified convention card available.** A simplified version of the regular ACBL convention card is now available. This card is similar to the regular card but less cluttered and easier to fill out. Make certain it is on hand for newer players (and unit members who play less complicated systems). The simplified convention card is affectionately known as the “Fat Free” card. You can download it [here](#).
- ♦ **Give trophies.** Newcomers like to win trophies. If the games are small and it isn’t cost effective to give a trophy for each game, a point system can be established where a trophy can be won by accumulating points, or give small prizes like decks of cards. (The unit might contribute prizes or solicit prizes from local businesses.)
- ♦ **Provide social activities for the new players.** Have a social activity along with a game to allow the newer players to get to know each other. (Try Bridge Bingo, a potluck supper, a wine and cheese party, etc.)
- ♦ **Print masterpoint receipts for non-members.** Be sure you give every non-member who wins masterpoints a receipt. Most new players who win a piece of a masterpoint will want to start collecting them. This is a perfect opportunity to capitalize on the lure of the masterpoint and get them to join ACBL and/or the club. Players joining the ACBL for the first time can claim up to a maximum of 20 masterpoints earned during the year prior to joining. Masterpoint receipts can be printed on ACBLscore.
- ♦ **Host an I/N sectional,** with the permission of the unit. To help with this project, the ACBL has provided a booklet called the I/N Tournament Planning Guide online at

New Player Services Program

One of the elements of a successful newcomer program is to establish a New Player Services (NPS) program. NPS is a public relations program designed to promote hospitality and to make the new players feel welcome at all levels of play. It is a program that can infuse your established unit members with enthusiasm about working with new players.

For more information and a full implementation guide, go to <http://web2.acbl.org/documentlibrary/units/NPS.pdf>.

Mentoring Program

If your unit has teachers, newcomer games and a start on an I/N program, the next logical step is to provide a mentoring program.

A mentoring program can be implemented in conjunction with the UEL. Mentoring programs can help new players and students discover how much fun duplicate bridge can be. These programs also help club/unit members bond together in a project designed to benefit everyone.

Mentors will remember what it was like to be a beginner; the mentees will be made more comfortable and welcome. In general, the goodwill created by these programs will make the games at local clubs more pleasant. One type of mentor program has three tiers (expert, intermediate, new). You must mentor the level below you to be eligible to be mentored by the upper group. See the [Bridge Mentoring Program Guide](#).

Resources for I/N Coordinators

ACBL's Resource Center has many materials available for I/N Coordinators. These include guides, handouts, advertising templates, logos, clip art and other promotional items. All items on the resource center are free for download or shipping. Click [here](http://www.acbl.org/resourcecenter) or visit www.acbl.org/resourcecenter to see what's available.



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