



New Player Services Guide

Table of Contents

New Player Services	1
Importance of the NPS Program	1
How NPS Works	1
Getting Started	2
Services Provided by NPS	3
Meetings	4
Promotional Ideas for NPS Members	5
Publicity	5
Tracking the Program for the Future	5
Resources	6

New Player Services

New Player Services (NPS) is a public relations program designed to welcome new players to tournaments and local games by helping to create a fun, friendly and comfortable atmosphere within the duplicate environment.

The goal of NPS is growth of Intermediate/Newcomer participation at all levels.

Importance of the NPS Program

Surveys suggest the three main reasons newcomers are attracted to duplicate are:

- ♠ The challenge of competition.
- ♠ The anticipation of meeting new people.
- ♠ The promise of fun.

New players often venture into club games or their first tournament filled with fear and trepidation. Fear of embarrassment or failure may cloud the excitement of an advancing player. NPS Committee members help advancing players put these fears aside resulting in a positive experience for the players — one that they will want to repeat again and again — even if they come in last.

This guide will introduce some best practices and foster the implementation and growth of the program.

How NPS Works

NPS can be instituted at either the district, unit or club level. To date, the most effective programs have been started at the unit level. Ideally, each district should eventually have the program functioning at all levels. The Unit Education Liaison or I/N Coordinator are logical choices to organize the program. It is recommended that the coordinator be a member of your Education Committee.

The NPS program achieves its goal through a committee of volunteers. These volunteers provide information and assistance services at a level determined by the organizing district, unit or club.

The level of services provided by the volunteers can range from simple social interaction to the integral actions of a regular I/N program. These services are most effective when offered at sectional and regional tournaments. In addition, NPS can be provided at the club level, especially at newcomer games such as Bridge Plus+.

Getting Started

To get started you need:

- ♥ The support of the people in your area;
- ♥ The approval and support of the sponsoring organization;
- ♥ Funding from the sponsoring organization.

Support of the people in your area:

Talk with bridge teachers in the area to see if they would support a program to make their students more comfortable at ACBL games. Find out if they will promote the idea and send new players to these “protected atmosphere” games.

Also meet with club managers to see if they will support a program to welcome new players. (Having help in hosting friendlier newcomer games should interest your club owners.)

You should also speak with the people who serve as tournament chairs in your area. If your sectionals and regionals are offering the ACBL I/N Program, interest in the NPS program will be high. If all of your tournaments don't offer I/N Programs, the NPS program will help get one started. (Units are encouraged to advertise and offer games for 0-5, 0-20, 0-50, 0-100 and 0-200 players every session and to provide at least four of the basic I/N activities at all sectional tournaments.)

The NPS program works hand-in-hand with events and activities designed to bring new players into ACBL tournament play.

The same people who have offered their support for the program could serve on your committee. It is important that your committee consists of players who are friendly and have outgoing personalities.

The Approval and support of the sponsoring organization:

Consider putting the development of a NPS Committee on the agenda for the next unit board meeting along with an initial budget or request for some type of funding.

Funding for the program:

Prepare a budget for the program based on the services the program will provide. Include the costs for any organizational meetings and mailings needed throughout the year. The meetings can be as elaborate as providing breakfast or as simple as just serving coffee. (If you are not given an entertainment budget to use for meetings, be creative. You can ask to use a tournament hospitality suite one morning and have committee members bring snacks, or you could reserve a section of a restaurant that serves a buffet between sessions and ask each person to get his or her own dinner.)

Services Provided by NPS

The basic services are provided by the hosts who offer their time free of charge at I/N games or in the I/N area at tournaments. These NPS Committee members will:

- ◆ Socialize.
- ◆ Answer questions.
- ◆ Make and pass out name tags.
- ◆ Assist with partnerships.
- ◆ Explain duplicate procedures such as filling out the convention card and scoring.
- ◆ Assist the I/N Tournament Directors as they sell entries.
- ◆ Assist at the NPS area of the Hospitality Desk at tournaments.

In addition to these basic activities, NPS can offer any services requested by the unit board or suggested by the NPS Committee. This is especially true at tournaments where other services may include:

- ♣ Distributing candy or gifts for new players.
- ♣ Taking pictures of winners.
- ♣ Distributing trophies to winners.
- ♣ Attending social events such as wine and cheese parties, bridge bingo and the Newcomer Reception which help the new players get to know each other.
- ♣ Passing out surveys to new players.

The I/N budget should cover these services. No matter what services are provided by committee members, the focus of the program should remain one of social interaction in an effort to create a friendly atmosphere for new players.

NPS Committee members should have badges and wear them at tournaments (even when away from their home unit or district) and when they are invited to visit the I/N area. NPS members are especially welcome to visit the I/N area at NABCs.

Meetings

There are no established guidelines for how many meetings are necessary or even practical (in a large unit) per year.

A kick-off meeting for all members of the committee with follow-up meetings periodically is recommended.

An organizational meeting should take place a couple of months prior to any regional in the area.

While it is possible to have committee members float during tournaments, it is more effective for each person to have a specific assignment. This eliminates any conflicts the members might have in trying to plan their own personal schedules for each tournament.

These assignments should include:

- ♠ Hospitality Desk
- ♠ I/N Tournament Director Assistant
- ♠ I/N Playing Area
- ♠ I/N Partnership Desk

During regionals, committee members may not want to be on call every session. Making specific assignments makes it less stressful for committee members.

The number of committee members assigned to the I/N playing area depends on the size of the room and the number of participants, but there should be at least two.

Even if you begin your NPS program with just a few members, you will soon have players asking to join when they see what a valuable service you are providing.

When it is time to add new members to your committee, consider asking the newcomers to participate. They will feel honored and will do an outstanding job for you. It is a definite plus for your program to have someone on the committee actually playing in the I/N games.

When someone joins the committee, they should be sent a welcome letter that explains the purpose of NPS and the role of the committee members. Distinctive NPS badges allow new players to identify committee members. If it is practical, the badges should be presented officially.

Because people might be interested in serving for only a year or two, your committee should always be on the lookout for new members.

In order to maintain a viable and effective committee, the NPS Coordinator should continually be looking for ways to keep the program fresh. Successful programs will often lose their impact if they aren't given a new look from time to time.

Promotional Ideas for NPS Members

- ♥ Hold a NPS poster contest and place the posters in the playing area.
- ♥ Decorate baskets for passing out candy in the playing area. This could also be a contest.
- ♥ Present recognition awards to the NPS members giving the most volunteer time to the program.
- ♥ Don't forget to say "thank you" to committee members. This can be done with a "recognition certificate," candy, dinner, free entries, etc.

Publicity

The more publicity the NPS program gets when it is launched, the faster it will become known and the easier it will be to implement.

- ◆ Unit/district publications — Write an article to get the ball rolling and then ask the editor if you can write a regular NPS column to keep everyone up-to-date.
- ◆ Posters — Use the posters generated by a contest to advertise the program and hang them at local clubs or tournaments.
- ◆ Call the local media to cover the meeting where you officially launch the program.

Tracking the Program for the Future

Analyze the program

The unit/district board and club owners will want to know if the program is working before approving a budget for the second year of NPS. First year statistics won't be conclusive.

Here is some information you can gather to present to the board:

- ♣ Testimonials from players in the I/N program.
- ♣ Surveys from new players, if your budget allows.
- ♣ Comments from teachers involved in the program whose students have had positive reactions to the new services.

Track participation of new players for the first year

Record the names of the players participating in the newcomer games for each club and tournament where NPS Committee members offer their services.

Document expenses

Keeping an accurate record of expenses for the first year is essential. Include both initial and ongoing expenses.

Resources

ACBL's Resource Center has many materials available. 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](#) or visit www.acbl.org/resourcecenter to see what's available.



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