

**HANDBOOK
FOR
INTERMEDIATE-NEWCOMER
COORDINATORS**



American Contract Bridge League

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Introduction

Congratulations on your appointment as unit intermediate-newcomer (IN) coordinator. Your job is an extremely important one since you will be working with a large segment of ACBL's members. Did you realize that 60% of ACBL members have less than 300 masterpoints.

To help you get started in your new position, the ACBL has put together this handbook of suggestions and ideas. Please give us a call in the Education Department (662-253-3100, ext. 3172) or contact us by e-mail (education@acbl.org) if you have questions or if we can be of assistance to you.

When ACBL developed the position of IN 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 IN sectionals (or to work with club managers when the unit delegates this privilege to a club) and to develop IN programs for all unit sectionals. This is what you will be trying to do for your unit.

First you need to understand what an IN program is (check out page 2) and what an IN sectional is (check out page 3).

If you are living within a unit where there is an education liaison (UEL) and an Education Committee is in place, it will be easier to focus exclusively on the task at hand.

In you are both the IN coordinator and the education liaison, start by deciding how much time you have to give to this volunteer pursuit and set some realistic goals (use the survey on page 6 to help you with this task).

You might want to meet with the unit president to discuss appointing a UEL to work with you and to discuss the various options open to the unit. Once you decide where to start — with teachers, with a New Player Services (NPS) program, with an IN sectional — go to that specific section of this booklet to find out what is involved.

Consider appointing a committee to work with you. 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 IN coordinator or the job of education liaison without help.

Good luck! The ACBL Education Department (education@acbl.org or ext. 3172) is available to help you with your job.

ACBL Intermediate-Newcomer Program

WHAT IS AN IN PROGRAM?

An intermediate-newcomer 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. IN activities can be restricted to any group(s) of non-Life Master players (0 to 300).

There are ten basic ingredients of a “full” newcomer program for sectional and regional tournaments or IN sectionals. A booklet entitled “IN Tournament Planning Guide” is available online at www.acbl.org/units/tournamentManagement.html.

Games for 199er, 99er, 49er, 0 to 20 and 0 to 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.)

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.”

A special area/room for the IN games. A special room is desirable but often not available. IN 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 IN 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.

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 IN 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 IN program at any NABC. They can sign up by contacting the Education Department (662-253-3100, ext. 3172).

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.

Social Events. Social events give the players a better chance to get to know each other and to find partners for future events. 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 ideas that have worked.

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

Flyers to invite the players and guarantee partners. Mail flyers 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 the ACBL Data Services Department or produced from your unit’s own database.)

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 IN room/area to visit with the players, pass out candy, 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 New Player Services program. (See page 11.)

Newcomer hand records with analysis sheets. ACBL can provide these packages for the under 20 masterpoint players. This material provides an opportunity for the new players to re-examine and discuss the hands after the game.

WHAT IS AN IN TOURNAMENT OR AN IN PROGRAM AT A TOURNAMENT?

IN sectionals, IN regionals and IN programs are planned for players who are either new-to-duplicate or new-to-bridge. IN sectionals and IN regionals stand alone; IN programs are run as part of a regular sectional or regional tournament.

IN sectionals, IN regionals and IN 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.

IN tournaments/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 is the 10-point IN program defined on page 2.

A unit may hold an unlimited number of IN sectionals (unless limited by the district) and may delegate the sponsorship of these activities to clubs within its jurisdiction. IN sectionals can run from one to five days in length and require a sanction from the ACBL Tournament Department. An IN program can be held in conjunction with any sectional or regional tournament and does not require a separate sanction. The IN program schedule would be advertised along with the events for the sectional or regional tournament.

Planning and running IN tournaments/programs tends to infuse unit members with new vitality by giving them an exciting project to work on as a team.

WHAT KIND OF IN PROGRAM CAN BE RUN WITH UNIT AND/OR CLUB GAMES?

Many of the 10 IN program activities can be offered in conjunction with a local unit or club game.

Scheduling 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.

Role of the Intermediate-Newcomer Coordinator

WHAT IS AN IN COORDINATOR?

The unit intermediate-newcomer (IN) 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.

WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC FOCUS OF AN IN COORDINATOR?

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

HOW DOES THE ROLE OF IN COORDINATOR DIFFER FROM THE UEL?

The UEL is involved with the big picture of making the unit aware of programs that the ACBL has made available to encourage participation and membership, and the UEL works with the unit to establish some or all of those programs (*e.g.*, TAP, mentoring, New Player Services, etc.). The IN coordinator focuses on creating and expanding the unit's IN program.

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

IN COORDINATORS IN LARGE AND SMALL UNITS

In a small unit, the IN coordinator can do most of the organizational work alone. The IN coordinator would work with the UEL, teachers, club managers, sectional tournament chair, the New Player Services Committee and the Education Committee. The IN coordinator reports directly to the unit board.

In a large unit, the IN coordinator must have a group of volunteers to do the footwork in the cities/areas where they each live and report back to the unit IN coordinator. Again the IN coordinator would work with the UEL, teachers, club managers, sectional tournament chair, the New Player Services Committee and the unit's Education Committee.

In both small and large units where nothing is in place, start by meeting with the UEL to make a plan. (If the unit doesn't have a UEL, you may want to request that the unit president appoint one.) See page 7 for tips on getting started.

Getting Started — Part I

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE UNIT'S IN ACTIVITY?

You should meet with the unit's previous IN 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 IN 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 an education liaison (UEL)?
- _____ 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?
 - _____ Bridge Plus+
 - _____ Supervised Play
 - _____ Easybridge!
 - _____ 0 to 5 Newcomer games
 - _____ Other limited masterpoint games
- _____ Does the unit sponsor one or more IN sectionals? (IN sectional sanctions can be given to a club.)
- _____ Are there newcomer games and IN activities at local sectionals?
- _____ Has the unit established a New Players' Services program?
- _____ Does the unit have an Education Committee?
- _____ Is there a mentoring program in place?

Note: If you are the IN 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.

Getting Started — Part II

After you have established what is in place, you might want to put together some realistic goals for the year and present them to the unit president or unit board.

For the purposes of this document, we will assume that your unit has done little in this area and we will help you get a program started.

STEP I — EDUCATION LIAISON (UEL)

If the unit has a UEL, meet first with this person. As we have mentioned, the duties of these two positions, UEL and IN coordinator, are intertwined and need to be coordinated.

If the UEL has an Education Committee in place, you should be a member of that committee and the other committee members would be available to assist you in your duties as well. No one person can effectively implement the ideas that will benefit your unit through new player growth.

If the unit doesn't have a UEL, meet with the unit board to consider appointing one.

STEP 2 — TEACHERS

There aren't regular lessons available in your area. If there aren't teachers regularly offering bridge classes, talk with the UEL about asking the unit to sponsor a TAP (Teacher Accreditation Program). (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.

There are teachers offering lessons regularly in your area.

Schedule a meeting with the teachers 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 to take more lessons, and they should be happy to meet with you.

Here are some questions to explore:

1. Would one or more of the teachers be interested in running a Bridge Plus+ game?

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?
 - a. Send students a congratulatory letter and certificate after completing a course to introduce the unit and the ACBL,
 - b. Establish a limited masterpoint game to run concurrently with the unit game,
 - c. Give graduates a free play to a limited masterpoint game,
 - d. Host a party once a year to welcome new players,
 - e. Develop a mentoring program,
 - f. Run an IN sectional to introduce new players to the special activities for people who are new to duplicate bridge,
 - g. Offer an IN program at a regular unit sectional tournament.
3. Ask for other ideas on how the unit can work with and help the teachers.

Note: Other than the IN sectional, an IN program at a sectional or regional, or a newcomer game along with the unit game, these other areas would be handled primarily by the unit's UEL.

STEP 3 — CLUBS

Although you work for the unit, clubs may be happy to have you help them set up an IN 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 IN 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 Handbook for Club Managers 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

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.

Offer limited masterpoint games. Recognize that the area needs newcomer games to prosper. 60% of all ACBL members have under 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, 49er, 0 to 20 and 0 to 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.

Run Bridge Plus+ with a teacher. Offer a supervised play session to help get students used to coming to the club to play.

Host an IN sectional, with the permission of the unit. To help with this project, the ACBL has provided a booklet called the IN Tournament Planning Guide online at www.acbl.org/units/tournamentManagement.html.

Start a mentoring program. A mentoring program can be implemented in conjunction with the unit (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 Mentoring Handbook online at www.acbl.org/units/units.html.)

Start an Easybridge! game. Easybridge! 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 clubhouse. 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 and make partnerships. 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.

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.)

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 ACBL product #SS4 and is affectionately known as the “Fat Free” card. (Note that “The Exciting World of Bridge” is an outstanding brochure for students attending their first game and it has as a centerpiece a simplified convention card filled in and ready to go.)

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.

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.)

Use Bridge Bingo to entertain your players. —Bridge players love to play bingo —especially Bridge Bingo. You can play Bridge Bingo at the start of a game to get the players there on time or at the end of a game to keep the players busy until the scores are posted. Giving the winner a prize only adds to the fun and excitement. Here’s how it works.

1. Each player gets a hand of 13 cards (in a game it would be the last hand of the session).
2. One person goes to the mike with a full deck of *shuffled* cards and calls them out one at a time.
3. As they are called, the players turn down the cards they have in their hands.
4. The first person to turn all 13 cards is the winner.

Host a party for unit recognition of newcomer achievements. A program was started in Houston, Texas that your unit might want to duplicate. The unit recognizes the achievement of new players when they complete their first bridge course. Since these students are potential new unit members, the unit provides an excellent new player booklet called *Adventures in Duplicate* (available to units from ACBL for \$2 each) and a congratulatory letter. If your unit adopts this program (check with your unit membership chair), you can invite a unit official to make these presentations at a local club and 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.

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 MPs earned during the year prior to joining. Masterpoint receipts can be printed on ACBLscore or a more decorative variety can be ordered from the ACBL Club and Member Services Department.

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; club calendar of events; info on your mentoring program,
- An upcoming tournament flyer,

- A free play and an ACBL duplicate instant scorer,
- An invitation to a welcome party (special bridge game and luncheon),
- Flyer 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 (the Exciting World of Bridge) or a copy of *Adventures in Duplicate*.

Use travelers and pickup slips. Many clubs find using a combination of traveling scoreslips and pickup slips better than just using one or the other. Here are some ideas:

1. Use travelers through round 12 and pickup slips for round 13.
2. Use travelers that stay with the boards and pickup slips that the players put into a basket on your desk as they finish play.
3. Have North score the pickup slip; have South score the traveler.

STEP 4 — NEW PLAYER SERVICES PROGRAM

What is a New Player Services program? One of the ten points of a successful newcomer program is to establish a New Player Services program. This is an idea that was originated in District 7 by Anita Humfleet. It is a public relations (PR) 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.

Should your unit establish a New Player Services (NPS) program? For more information and a full implementation guide, go to www.acbl.org/units/units.html to download a copy of the “New Player Services Program Handbook.”

STEP 5 — MENTORING PROGRAMS

Is your unit ready for a mentoring program? If your unit has teachers, newcomer games and a start on an IN program, the next logical step is to provide a mentoring program which is sometimes called an “adopt-a-newcomer” program. Again, work with your UEL (unit education liaison) who should be the coordinator of this project.

How do we get started? ACBL provides implementation information in the “Mentoring Chair Handbook” available online at www.acbl.org/units/units.html.

Materials Available for IN Coordinators

Check ACBL's online product guide at www.acbl.org for information on the *Adventures in Duplicate* booklet (#310572), Instant Scorers (#560249), "The Exciting World of Bridge" pamphlet (#560347) and the simplified convention card (Private Score – Form SS4) (#170316).



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