

Club Growth Workshop

Facilitated by the VBA – 23 June

Listed below are some of the ideas discussed for growing bridge, along with the individuals who led discussions on each topic. While not all ideas will be appropriate for all clubs, we would encourage every club to identify a few initiatives appropriate for them.

Targeting New Members – Alan Blackburn – Geelong Bridge Club

- Highly visible sign on the clubhouse
- Press releases on topics of interest to local newspapers to obtain publicity
- Engage with U3A
- Letterbox drop by member of upcoming beginner's lessons
- Advertise on community noticeboards
- Survey new members (postcode – to identify gaps, how they heard about the lessons)
 - Referral from friends (25% for Geelong) – Encourage referrals
 - Website (14%) – Ensure useful website
 - Signage (11%)
- Start a Facebook page with links to/from other community sites in the area
 - Link to the club website
 - Take lots of photos of people having fun

Beginners' programs – John Haylock (Paynesville) & Lorraine Robinson (Sale)

- For smaller clubs, consider running beginners' program with neighbouring clubs (which Sale, Bairnsdale and Paynesville did together)
- Consider combining online and face-to-face training
- Options:
 - Bridge in a day (An approach used by RealDealBridge), so participants don't have to commit to a long program, or
 - 6-8 week programs, so they get use to attending weekly
- Aim to make beginner's programs as enjoyable as possible
- Charge for entire beginners course up front, to encourage participants to complete the course
- Consider how to keep them engaged post-program as part of the design of the program
- Create a summary memory jogger (prompt cards), that beginners can use when they start within a club

Supporting progression from beginners' programs

- Offer follow-up classes to encourage beginners to stay involved
 - Conversion of those who start beginner's lessons into club members is around 30% according to ABF and WBF numbers
- Assign a mentor to support each person
- Include the cost of club membership and a bridge book in the cost of the course?
- Actively welcome new members
- Invite each 'graduate' of the beginners program to play at the club, with a club member
- Provide a safe, playing environment where less experienced players are welcome
 - Create a culture where 'bullies' do not drive new players away
 - Provide a relaxed, social session at least once a week where players can ask questions and share a pizza
- Consider "pro-am" events where stronger players play with less experienced players
- Help establish new partnerships via orphan day (once a month?) or individual competitions (i.e. bridge speed-dating)
- Establish a buddy system – Waverley has the name of a "Bridge buddy" up on the noticeboard, that anyone can approach about any issue (bidding, play, etiquette, support). The bridge buddy can rotate to share the workload.
- Consider a break half-way through some sessions, with food provided by members, to encourage social interaction
- Actively encourage volunteers to contribute to the club, as this also helps build the club community

Intermediate programs – Sue Beckman (Frankston)

- Run for an hour, before a duplicate session, every second week
- Member directed - based on topics requested by club members (e.g. interference over NT, leads, director's rules)
- Participants can bring their hands to discuss
- Effective way to get people back to the club
- Great way to engage senior players at the club, to lead the sessions

Mentoring – Phillip Young (Moonee Valley)

- Can be done at the club or online (via BBO & Zoom)
- Helps build the social aspect of bridge (not as competitive as duplicate), while also improving the skills of players
- Provides a forum for people to play with different partners
- Can progress players through different standards
- Lots of players willing to volunteer as mentors
- Can enable players to ask questions from hands they have played elsewhere

Youth Bridge – Rebecca O’Reilly (ABF)

- Youth players get free membership to ABF and half price at any ABF events
- VBA have a weekly youth night (free pizza) for anyone under 30, with support from an expert
- Can also arrange online games via free access to Real Bridge
- Aiming to run a “learn bridge in a day” session at the VBA – targeting youth players – later this year
- Moonee Valley Bridge club is running a pilot with the goal of getting bridge into schools
- Harder to get bridge into universities as it needs to be started by the students

Additional Comments – Peter Cox (Marketing – ABF)

- Jan-March 2022 players down 25% on 2019 levels and down 40% in Victoria
 - We are facing a crisis – Lost 3,000 members and they are playing less often
- Have a host welcome people to each session – Not the director, but a friendly member of the club who makes people feel welcome
- Make the club a fun place to be
- Engage with the broader community (golf club, shopkeepers, noticeboards, etc)

Suggestions for the VBA

- Create a list on our website of upcoming lessons and private lessons that those interested in learning bridge can be referred to
- Create a standard set of materials that can be used by smaller clubs to run their own training courses (including Teachers notes)

For more information or suggestions please contact:

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