

Summer 2025 ACBL Board of Directors Meetings Report

The ACBL Board of Directors held its summer 2025 face-to-face meetings Monday, July 21 through Thursday, July 24 in Philadelphia. The Board, and its Committees and Task Forces, continue to meet regularly virtually via Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

FINANCE

In June 2025, the gain from operations was \$153K, exceeding budget by \$77K and \$59K better than June 2024. Monthly revenues were \$1.26M, better than the \$1.22M budgeted. Expenses were \$1.1M, \$72K better than the \$1.2M budgeted.

Year-to-date (YTD), the gain in net assets is \$687K. This includes an unrealized gain of \$322K from the change in market value of investments. The YTD gain is \$1M greater than the budget but \$488K less than the \$1.2M YTD gain from the previous year. The balance sheet remains strong, with \$13.7M in cash and investments and \$5.5M in deferred revenue from future membership expirations.

The ACBL Statements of Financial Condition for the years ended December 31, 2023 and 2024, are published on pages 74 and 75 of the June 2025 issue of the *ACBL Bridge Bulletin*.

The Board approved Finance Committee Motion 252-FN01 which amends the ACBL Codification. This amendment eliminates specific language detailing the methodology, frequency, and rates of foreign exchange fees, thereby providing ACBL Management with increased operational flexibility to respond to market fluctuations.

MEMBERSHIP

As of July 2025, the total number of members is 121,499. This is a decrease of 7,707 members, or 5.96%, over the trailing 12 months. Year-to-date, new members total 4,145, which is an increase of 98 members (2.42%) over the number of new members YTD this time last year.

GROWING THE GAME

The Task Force for Rewarding Members through Rank Advancement was created to develop incentives for member retention and rank progression. The primary objective is to increase member engagement and competitive bridge participation by formally recognizing player achievements at key milestones.

The Task Force and Management collaborated to create a framework for member incentives, resulting in the Sapphire Program, a new way to recognize and reward new players. Sapphires are not points, but badges earned for progress and participation in various activities, including completing lessons, and engaging with local clubs and the broader bridge community.

Players will be able to combine Sapphires with cash to purchase exclusive merchandise from an upcoming online store. The first of these items – ACBL's 100th-anniversary gear – was sold on-

site at the Philadelphia NABC and met with great enthusiasm. This popular merchandise will be among the featured products in the new online store.

GUEST MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM UPDATES

The ACBL has simplified its Guest Membership Program, now integrated with the Sapphire Program, to offer a clear pathway for new players to transition to full membership. This integration creates a cohesive system that guides new members from their first steps to becoming a full ACBL member.

Guest memberships are now free and do not expire, allowing new players to join simply by providing their name, email, and zip code.

Upon signing up, guest members receive a welcome email with their member number. They also get access to the redesigned MyACBL portal to track their progress and celebrate wins, along with weekly bridge strategy tips delivered via email.

Guest members can earn up to 20 Masterpoints. Once this limit is reached, a full membership is required to continue earning points and to participate in regional and national tournaments. The program encourages this transition with a user-friendly process and a discounted rate for the first year of full membership.

SUPPORTING UNITS AND DISTRICTS

During its spring meetings in Memphis, the Board addressed "Pathways to Improving Tournaments," a comprehensive initiative aimed at addressing challenges facing tournament organizers. This initiative focused on three key areas: optimizing tournament schedules, refining overall scheduling, and improving staffing models.

At the summer meetings in Philadelphia, Management built upon this foundation with a series of recommendations that were supported by the Board. These recommendations address approaches to improving tournament finances and player satisfaction while balancing local autonomy.

- **Ending Online Events at F2F Regionals:** Due to poor attendance and financials, online events at F2F regional tournaments will no longer be approved. Existing events will be permitted to proceed, but organizers are encouraged to remove them from their schedules.
- **Optimizing Tournament Schedules:** To better align regional tournament schedules with current player demographics, ACBL is updating its internal regional planning document. This document, which incorporates best practices from Districts and Units, will be tailored for different tournament sizes and shared with all tournament organizers. ACBL Area Managers will serve as subject matter experts, assisting organizers in creating more effective events and schedules. Feedback on the updated document will be requested from all tournament organizers.
- **Exploring Approaches to Tournament Director (TD) Staffing:** To address the high cost of tournament directors, Management is exploring a "staff-lite" approach. This

involves more accurately pre-estimating staffing needs and having on-call backup directors instead of overstaffing tournaments from the outset.

- **Championing Pre-Registration:** Pre-registration has long been viewed as a solution to several challenges. It would allow for better planning, more accurate staffing, and a more enjoyable experience for players. The Board continues to support the expansion of the Entry Express system to regional tournaments for advance entry purchase. Incentives and methods to encourage other aspects of pre-registration will be explored.
- **Evaluating the Future of Local Sectionals:** Currently, Local Sectionals are Open Tournaments lasting one to three days with fewer than 25 tables per session. These events award silver Masterpoints at a reduced rate and can be run by certified club directors or Tournament Assistants instead of a full-time ACBL Tournament Director.

Based on data and anecdotal information presented in Philadelphia, the Board's Bridge Committee will discuss how Local Sectionals can be adapted to better serve the needs of players in the post-pandemic environment. Discussion will focus on whether to lift existing restrictions on events, whether organizers should have the autonomy to manage the events to best serve their unique needs, and how changes would affect large Open Sectionals run by ACBL Tournament Directors.

REVISING UNIT PRESIDENTS HANDBOOK

Management, in partnership with a Board Liaison, is updating the Unit Presidents Handbook and expects a new online version by year's end. This centralized resource will streamline leadership transitions and promote more efficient Unit management by providing easy access to best practices.

COMBATING ONLINE CHEATING

The ACBL continues to utilize EDGAR (Everyone Deserves a Game Above Reproach) to detect online cheating. With much focus and effort on evolution of disciplinary regulations and processes, no new runs of EDGAR have taken place since November 2024, other than for people being considered for National Committees or the Hall of Fame.

Since February 1, 2024, 12,089 players have been submitted for screening, with a total of 37,875 examined (this includes their partners). Approximately 900 players identified by EDGAR have been charged or received Official Warnings. The current online cheating rate, which includes all players (members, non-members, and inactive accounts), is estimated to be between 2.5% and 3%. Disciplinary actions have included Official Warnings (185), Fast Track Discipline (FTD) (571 players), Negotiated Resolutions (NR) (50), Expedited Disciplinary Panels (10), and Institute of Bridge Arbitration resolutions (15), with 24 resignations pending charges and 42 pending cases.

APPEALS & CHARGES COMMITTEE

The Appeals & Charges Committee Chair reported on its approval of two Negotiated Resolutions for ethical violations flagged by computer-based cheating detection. One was for a pair who were given Suspensions Pending Hearing (SPH) in March. The SPH was due to cheating in the March online Regional. The pair was pulled from FTD and agreed to a six-month suspension. The other NR was for a second offense. One partner admitted to the charge, accepted expulsion, and will be able to apply for readmission in five years.

REVISIONS TO DISCIPLINARY REGULATIONS

In response to widespread online cheating that began during the 2020-2021 pandemic, ACBL implemented disciplinary regulations and processes to protect the game's integrity. ACBL recognizes the initial approach was in some ways too rigid, sometimes leading to discipline disproportionate to the offense. To address this, Management, in coordination with the Appeals & Charges Committee, proposed a series of changes, which the Board has approved.

- **Club Discretion for Suspended Players:** Club leadership now has the discretion to allow suspended members to return to F2F club play under limited, controlled conditions. The policy for suspended members to participate in club games applies only to players who were charged after February 1, 2024. Rationale for this date is that use of EDGAR, ACBL's computer-based cheating detection program that flags online cheating, was initiated effective with the version of the Code of Disciplinary Regulations of that date. The new policy is designed specifically for players who were flagged by this program. Suspended members who are permitted to play are still considered Members Not in Good Standing. Among the restrictions are that players are only allowed to play in specified games and may not play with any complicit partners. They are not permitted to direct games or be present at games in which they are not participating.
- **Review of Pre-2022 Online Cheating Cases:** All cases of players identified by EDGAR as colluding online, but who clearly ceased this behavior before 2022, will be reviewed. The Office of the National Recorder will communicate any modifications to a player's current discipline directly to them.
- **Revisions to the Ethics Certification and Fair Play Pledge (EC/FPP):** The mandatory admission of guilt has been replaced with a "No Contest" plea. Players who receive an Official Warning are no longer required to submit an EC/FPP. Players who previously failed to submit their EC/FPP will be given a new opportunity to do so, potentially allowing for limited club play and a reduction in their current discipline. An Official Warning for collusive online cheating is still considered a first offense. A second violation of the same nature will result in expulsion if the player is found responsible.

New Resources and Communications Regarding Disciplinary Changes

Communications detailing these changes have been sent to ACBL clubs and to membership. New documents have been added to the Ethics & Discipline page on the ACBL website. These documents clarify the various disciplinary statuses, outline corresponding restrictions, and specify the criteria suspended members must meet for limited club play.

Previously, lists of members who were Under Discipline or Resigned with Pending Charges were only available as PDFs. This process has now been automated, allowing users to search for these individuals by name, Unit, District, player number, and the specific type of discipline.

To view Hearing Reports and the Under Discipline List, go to the ACBL's ethics page. This information is updated several times daily.

GOVERNANCE

The Governance Committee continues its work to streamline the ACBL Codification, the central collection of Board-approved rules and regulations, with the goal of creating a more user-friendly document with simpler language and structure. As part of this ongoing effort, the Governance Committee is creating a new committee chapter and has completed the revisions of the membership chapter.

Stemming from this work, Governance brought forward DI252-GV03 to clarify the rights of non-members who participate in ACBL events. This discussion item aims to ensure consistency and clarity in the ACBL's Arbitration Agreement and civil litigation policies for all participants, which is expected to lower the organization's litigation risk. This discussion will result in one or more motions for the fall meetings in San Francisco.

The Board Resource Manual is nearing completion. It will be a valuable tool for new and continuing Board members. The revised manual is designed to address common questions and provide essential reference materials. This will streamline the onboarding process for new members, provide ongoing support, and enhance collaboration within the Board.

The Governance Committee put forward five motions to refine Board operating procedures and improve efficiency, with the goal of maximizing discussion time and focusing on the organization's strategic direction and objectives. The motions covered a range of topics, from defining committee structures to modernizing the election process.

Three of these motions were passed as part of the Consent Calendar:

- Motion 252-GV01 defines the structure and selection process for the Board Oversight Committee (BOC) which is responsible for investigating and resolving Board member conduct issues.
- Motion 252-GV04 establishes a new protocol for Board members reporting observations about employee work and conduct. This ensures the Executive Director (ED) maintains their role in employee management, centralizes intake of concerns and protects confidentiality.
- Motion 252-GV06 establishes an annual review process for the Board's governance policies and the Board Resource Manual. This ensures these important documents remain current and effective, with reviews to be initiated by the Governance Committee in the fourth quarter of each year.

The following two motions were passed through Board discussion and vote:

- Motion 252-GV03 establishes a new "Board Meeting Agenda and Unscheduled Items Policy." This policy updates guidelines for managing the agenda and provides a process for addressing unscheduled business during Board deliberations.
- Motion 252-GV05 introduces improvements to the election process for Board and Advisory Council (AC) members. The new process will be more streamlined and transparent, expand use of electronic systems and implement a condensed timeline. New election calendar deadlines and changes will be communicated to units and the membership.

Enhancing Communication Practices

The Governance Committee plays an important role in ensuring transparency and keeping membership informed about the Board's activities. To this end, Governance produces this National Board Report, providing a summary of key discussions, decisions, and ongoing initiatives. Additionally, the Committee provides content for the Board page of the *ACBL Bridge Bulletin*, another avenue for members to stay connected with the work of the Board.

REVISED HALL OF FAME PROCEDURES

The Board has approved Codification changes to the Hall of Fame operating procedures. The updates simplify the election process by streamlining voting, revising criteria for candidate evaluation, and updating elector eligibility. The list of events used for both candidate performance and elector qualifications has also been updated to include the Soloway Teams and the Wuhan Cup.

INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS TASK FORCE

The International Stakeholders Task Force was formed to focus on ACBL's international bridge administration relationships, including with the World Bridge Federation (WBF), North American Bridge Federation (NABF), United States Bridge Federation (USBF), Canadian Bridge Federation (CBF), and Federación Mexicana de Bridge (FMB). The Task Force is gathering and organizing information on these bodies, their missions, how they are organized and function, and their key positions and officials. It is engaging them to assess the state of mutual relationships and to identify matters and issues to address together. Where helpful, suggestions will be developed for clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the ACBL Board and Management in dealings with these bodies. The Task Force is supporting the Governance Committee in documenting roles and expectations for ACBL representatives to the bodies.

FALL 2028 NABC EXPERIMENTAL MODEL

Management has proposed a new, experimental model for the fall 2028 North American Bridge Championships (NABC). This model would focus exclusively on national-level NABC and NABC+ events, while offering drop-in options to secondary events. The events would feature flighting and clearer titles, offering opportunities for players of all levels to compete, advance, and achieve. Pre-registration would be required, allowing sourcing of high-quality, mid-sized venues in cities that are not currently affordable due to larger space requirements. This approach has the potential to re-energize NABCs, with event space that matches attendance. The Board has authorized Management to research venue and event schedule options. Next steps will include defining success metrics, managing potential risks, and planning for a smooth execution of the model.

NEW MASTERPOINT CLASS: TITANIUM POINTS

To recognize top-level performance for players with fewer than 10,000 Masterpoints, a new class of Masterpoints, tentatively called Titanium Points, is being explored. Titanium would be awarded in top-tier national finals, bridging the gap between traditional Gold and Platinum points. Recipients would be recognized in NABC Bulletins, creating a new milestone for this player demographic.

NABC SITE SELECTION: SUMMER 2031

Toronto remains a top contender for the summer 2031 NABC. The Board has authorized Management to work on finalizing a contract, and is currently negotiating with the venue and hotels to secure the best possible arrangements for our members.

APPOINTMENTS

Steve Beatty, Bernie Greenspan, Jim Munday, and Bruce Rogoff were appointed to the Online Ethical Oversight Committee (OEOC) to serve three-year terms from the end of the summer 2025 NABC through the end of the summer 2028 NABC.

Mark Aquino was appointed as the American Bridge Association (ABA) Liaison to serve a one-year term from the end of the summer 2025 NABC through the end of the summer 2026 NABC.