

Unit/District

Online Engagement Toolkit



Overview



Growth of online bridge is key to sustaining the game and the League, both during the pandemic and in the future. While the ACBL has been initiating targeted marketing campaigns to encourage online play, the grassroots efforts of units and districts are invaluable in reaching success. This toolkit delves into ideas, suggestions and examples for more personal, and thus more effective, outreach to players.

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Phone Calls (primary)

Reaching out with a phone call is ideal when it comes to persuasion. Nothing beats the personal touch of a friendly voice! Not only that, but a phone call gives you a unique chance to have a real back-and-forth conversation.

The ACBL can provide phone numbers of members in your area who aren't playing in online sanctioned games. Steps for requesting the list are printed in the ACBL Resources section at the end of this guide.

A good way to use this contact list is to divide it among several volunteers, each calling a set group of members. Using specific talking points will lead to a more natural conversation, but a script can also be used. We'll share some examples later in the toolkit.

Website/Social Media Posts

Using your unit/district website or Facebook page can be a great tactic for reaching out to players. After all, many members are online and visiting these sites already. Let's capture their attention and persuade them to join us in an online sanctioned game!

For both your website and Facebook page, think beyond an announcement of an upcoming game. Consider making posts about broader topics related to online bridge instead, like why playing bridge online is fun and its unique benefits, too. Members also like to see posts about themselves and fellow players. Try including member achievements (reports on top event winners in a unit or district are available) or even just regular spotlights on players, like selfies taken at the computer.

Another benefit of Facebook and other social media is how the platform can be used to create a community and provide a place to interact with old and new friends. Many players are missing the camaraderie of the table. Try approaching with a goal of engagement by posting questions or a friendly poll.

Emails

Occasional emails are another great way to engage players and encourage them to play online – but you'll want to use these sparingly. Too many emails will have an adverse effect, causing players to ignore your communication or even turn them off the very idea of online bridge.

The ACBL can provide email addresses of members in your area who aren't playing in online sanctioned games. Steps for requesting the list are printed in the ACBL Resources section at the end of this guide. (When sending an email to a large group of people, be sure to use the BCC function or a mass email tool, like Mail Chimp or Constant Contact, so that email addresses remain private.)

There are several different ways to use emails to connect, and it's worth experimenting to see what gets the best response from members in your area. A personal note is usually the most appealing way, but you may also want to try an email that's more like an announcement or other persuasive measure.

The direct approach is often the best approach! Reach out, preferably with a personal phone call, and speak with members about online bridge. A brief conversation is ideal, but sometimes even just a friendly voicemail will make an impact.

1. Ask if players need help getting started or have any questions about playing online. In one of our surveys, many members said they just don't know where to start online. Offer a helping hand, whether it's navigating the internet, setting up an account on Bridge Base Online or making it past some other stumbling block.

A brief opening script (or short note if using email) can help volunteers get the conversation started.

Example 1

"Hi, this is [Jenny] with [Unit 436] of the ACBL. I'd like to speak with [Todd] about playing bridge online. Is there anything I can do to help you get started with playing bridge online?"

Example 2

"Hi, this is [Fred] with [the Saddlehorse Unit]. The ACBL has been building up online bridge more and more each month. There are now lots of chances to win black and even gold or silver masterpoints online. Can I help you with any part of playing online?"

Those reaching out should be prepared to answer some of the more basic questions members could have, like using Bridge Base Online, but there are also ACBL resources that you can direct them to.

- Acbl.org/bbotutorials has many short videos taking players through basic aspects of navigating BBO.

2. Talk about the fun to be had online and what they can expect. Sometimes just hearing about the positive experiences you, the volunteer, have had can drive a player to give online bridge a try. Give the players on your list a call and let them know why you've been playing online bridge.

Talking points will probably work better than a script with this kind of phone call (or email) because you will be talking about your own experiences.

For a phone call, start with a friendly "hello," say you're reaching out to players in your area about playing bridge online and then try some of these talking points:

- Why you started playing bridge online
- Your favorite part of playing bridge online
- Why you think other players would enjoy it
- The different types of online bridge available (Virtual Clubs, Support Your Club individual daylong tournaments, special events with bonus masterpoint awards, etc.)

An email should also hit some of these same talking points but can be formatted differently, like as a personal letter, a "Top Ten" list of why you play bridge or a brief FAQ.

Follow up talking points with an offer to help them play online or find a partner. You could even offer to be their partner!

- Be sure to give members the next several steps they can take to start playing online.
- Consider having an email ready to send them with next steps, resources and a way they can reach you if they need help.

3. Announce events/games/help desks/Facebook page and share reminders as the date gets near.

Possible phone scripts:

- Hi [Jamie]! This is [Peter], and I'm also a bridge player. I wanted to remind you about the Silver Linings event coming up. You can earn silver points all next week when you play in the Virtual Clubs.
- Hi [Steven]! This is [Sarah] from [Unit 387], and I wanted to let you know about a virtual help desk for bridge players our unit is hosting next week. If you have any questions about online bridge, we'll be there to answer them. Let me know if you'd like a link to the help desk.
- Hello [Sharon]! My name is [Andy], and I'm a bridge player in your unit. We're reaching out to tell players about the unit's Facebook page. Would you be interested in following us?

Sample posts:

- Have a question about playing bridge online? Come to our unit's virtual help desk on Zoom tomorrow night! [insert link]
- The next online regionally rated event starts in just a few days! Will you be playing in Endless Summer?

Create a Local Partnership Desk for Online Play

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In one of our recent surveys, a quarter of respondents said they need help finding a partner. As a unit or district, you offer unique benefits not found on Bridge Base Online, like connecting players in the same community. Here are some ideas to try:

- 1. Set up a single email address (like unit333partner@gmail.com) where players can send requests.** Remember to check for emails every day, throughout the day.
- 2. Coordinate with Virtual Club managers.** As a unit or district, you can provide a link to other clubs in the area.
- 3. Encourage use of your Facebook page as a self-serve partnership desk.** Create a post every week where commenters can say they are looking for a partner for an upcoming event.

Foster a Feeling of Community

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One of the best parts of face-to-face bridge is meeting and spending time with other bridge players. Creating the same sense of community online is a bit harder, but a Facebook page is a great way to do it.

- 1. Start with creating either a Facebook "page" (a more business-style platform) or a Facebook "group" (a more informal platform that can be made private).**
 - Facebook's instructions for creating a "page": [Click here](#).
 - Facebook's instructions for creating a "group": [Click here](#).

2. Make regular updates to the page or group. This shows that your unit/district is active and gets the conversation going. Try asking followers a question to encourage more engagement.

Sample posts:

- It's a great day to play bridge! Are you playing online today? If so, where?
- Will you be playing in Stardust Week next week? Comment below if you need a partner.
- What are you most looking forward to when face-to-face bridge is back in session?

3. Respond to posts and questions. It's important to both keep momentum on social media and show that a commenter isn't speaking into a void. Your Facebook page or group is a community, and you are its leader.

Have Extra Help Readily Available

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About half of the ACBL's members have not played in a sanctioned online game. While video tutorials are helpful, a way to answer players' specific questions or address stumbling blocks is important to have.

1. Schedule Zoom "help desk" meetings with an online club director (or other member familiar with online play) who can answer questions. ACBL tournament directors have been hosting such meetings by creating a Zoom meeting and sharing the link in the Zoom invitation. They have been quite popular. By using Zoom, the host can share their computer screen, which can be very helpful.

2. Encourage members to email as they have questions or call a volunteer's phone number during a set time.

Zoom is becoming more common as a communication tool, but including methods a player feels more comfortable with is crucial.

3. Some of the topics we've heard the most questions about at Headquarters include:

- Uploading a convention card to Bridge Base Online (BBO).
- Viewing opponents' convention cards on BBO.
- Signing up for a BBO game or tournament.
- Calling a director on BBO.
- What happens when time runs out.
- Information on specific rules and regulations.

ACBL Resources for Units/Districts

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1. A contact list of members in your unit or district who are not playing online is a great place to start.

The ACBL can provide a PDF with member contact information. Here is how you can request this list:

Send an email to listlabel@acbl.org.

Include in your email the following:

- Your name
- Your unit or district
- Your official position or title
- Your intended use for the list
- Whether you'd like member phone numbers or email addresses.

2. The ACBL Resource Center is an online collection of digital images and templates (emails, fliers, etc.) and more that are free for you to use. Visit acbl.org/resourcecenter to access and download these resources.

What We're Doing at Headquarters

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We're in this together. Here are some of the things the staff has done to encourage playing bridge online.

1. Sending targeted email campaigns, e-newsletters and surveys. Here are some examples:

- "Invitation to Play" email sent to members who haven't played in a sanctioned online game. *See image 1.*
- "Spread the Word" email and corresponding e-newsletter sent to members who have played online. *See image 2 and 3.*
- **Surveys of members who haven't played in an online regionally rated event. Here are some key findings:**
 - Not having a partner was the primary reason that members had not played online.
 - Many members need help to find Virtual Clubs and other sanctioned games.
 - The main thing members miss with online bridge is the social aspect of in-person play.

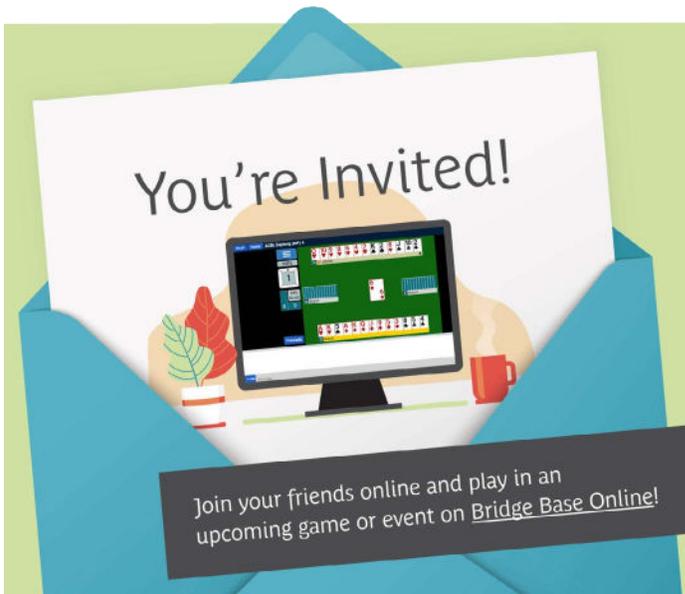
2. Posting on social media throughout the week.

- Promotions of online regionally rated events, like Winter Wonderland. *See image 4.*
- Teacher Feature, a regular spotlight on teachers (including if they teach online). *See image 5.*
- "Happy Halloween" meme. *See image 6.*

3. Hosting Zoom help desks. Four times a week for several months, ACBL tournament directors have hosted lived help desks on Zoom. Members with questions click the Zoom meeting link and can directly ask the tournament director a question, and both can "share" their screen to "show" what they see on the computer.

4. Coming soon: New targeted series of emails. We will be using a "drip campaign" to entice more members to play in online sanctioned games. A drip campaign is a pre-written set of emails with individual emails sent in a specific order in regular intervals.

Image 1 • “Invitation to Play” email



Play Today

- Virtual Clubs: Your usual club games online
- “Support Your Club” Black Point Games: Daily pair games benefitting your local club
- SYC Daylongs: Solo events each day, also benefitting your local club

Plan Your Play

- Fall into Bridge: A chance at gold masterpoints@
- Club Appreciation Week: Upgraded black points (details coming soon)

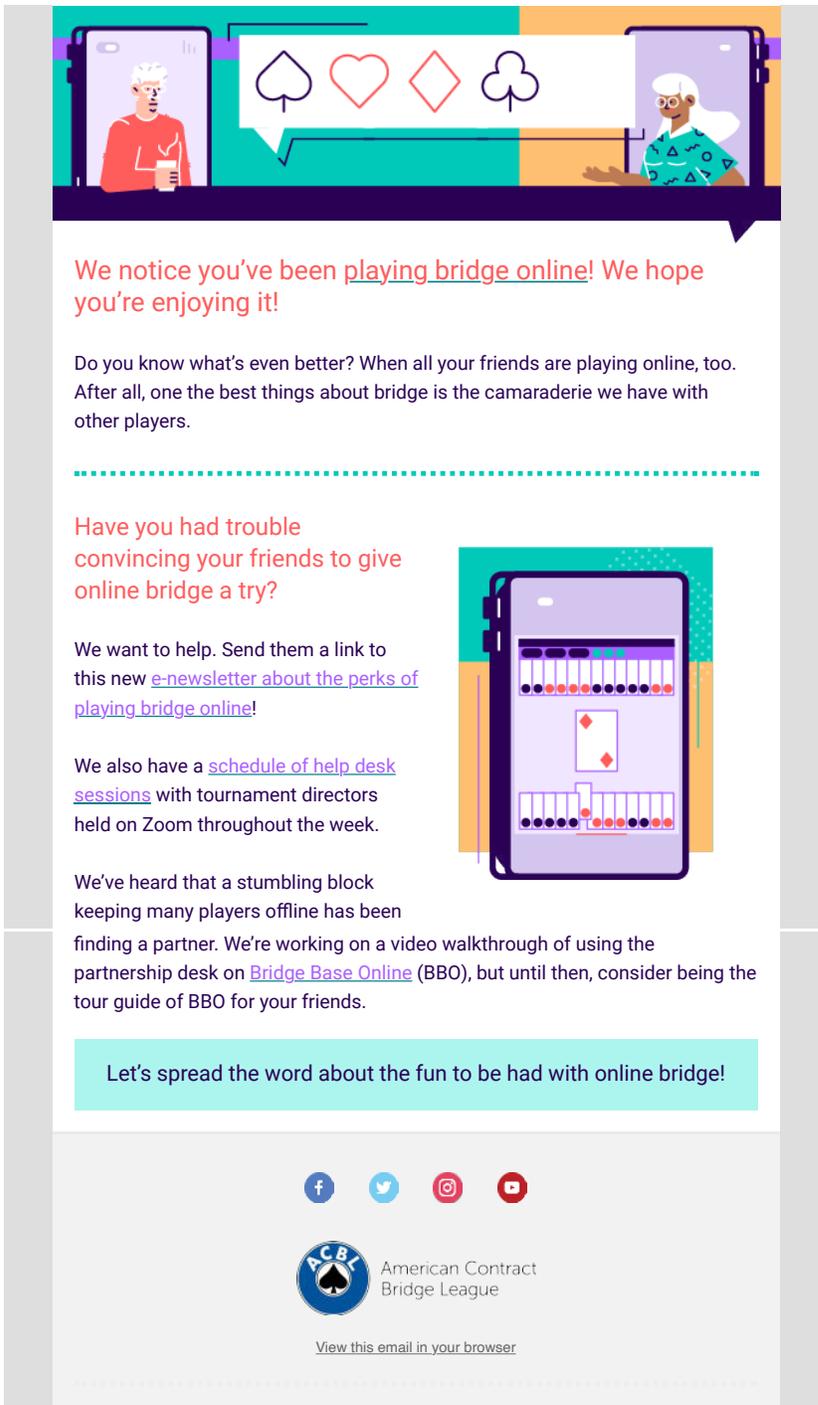
Need some help to get online? Tournament directors are leading Zoom help desks ([click here for schedule](#)), and there are also lots of ["how-to" videos](#) for using Bridge Base Online.

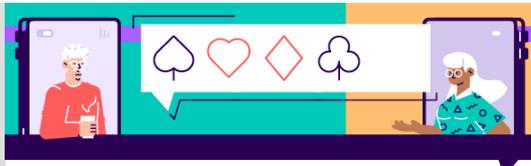
Play Now

Learn How



Image 2 • “Spread the Word” email





WHY SHOULD I TRY ONLINE BRIDGE?

While some in-person bridge clubs may be reopening, most are still currently closed. But the lack of face-to-face bridge doesn't have to mean a lack of all bridge. You can still play – and win masterpoints® – every day. Believe it or not, this classic card game translates online quite nicely!



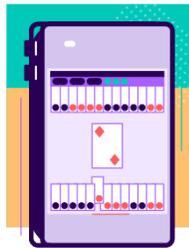
What can online bridge do for me?

- **Entertain you.** Bridge is the world's best card game.
- **Connect with your friends.** And not just your friends from the local club! Online bridge lets you partner with another player anywhere in the world.
- **Keep your skills sharp.** Regular practice will keep your play in top condition. Just like any other skill or muscle, you either use it or lose it.
- **Earn pigmented masterpoints.** Virtual bridge has been available for a while, but starting in 2020, you can now earn black, silver, red and gold masterpoints online.

Virtual bridge has been available for a while, but starting in 2020, you can now earn black, silver, red and gold masterpoints online.

What are the ways I can play?

- **Any kind of game.** Virtual bridge comes in many forms, everything from your usual club game to tournaments, playing together with a partner or solo with a robot.
- **Any place with internet access.** Whatever your preferred tool is – desktop, tablet or phone – there are a wide variety of websites and apps.
- **Any time of day.** Games start on bridge sites (like [Bridge Base Online](#) or [Fun Bridge](#)) just about any time of day, and with an app (like [Synrey](#) or [Tricky Bridge](#)), you can pick it up and set it down whenever you want.



What if I don't have a partner?



- **Touch base with your club's manager.** Most managers of [Virtual Clubs](#) are your usual club managers, who can help set you up with a partner.
- **Use the Bridge Base Online (BBO) partnership desks.** Two hours before events start on BBO, you can access that event's virtual partnership desk ([click here](#) for a helpful video and start at 1:25 for steps).
- **Pair with a bot.** Solo play – where a robot

is your partner – is also available every day on a variety of [platforms](#). Some of these games on [Bridge Base Online \(BBO\)](#) even award black points.

How do I get started?

- **Warm up with some solitaire games on acbl.org.** [Just Play Bridge](#) features an endless stream of hands, and there are three ways to play ([Minibrige](#), [Just Declare](#) and [Bridge Master](#)) that don't include a bidding step.
- **Watch a Bridge Base Online (BBO) tutorial.** Visit [acbl.org/bbotutorials](#) for short videos covering the basics on using [BBO's website](#). If you start playing on BBO and get stuck, bring your questions to one of the recurring [Zoom help desks](#).
- **Jump right into playing for black points.** Black masterpoints are awarded on BBO in several club-level games. There are two kinds of [Support Your Club \(SYC\) games daily](#), pair and individual, and Virtual Clubs are your local club games but online.
- **Visit [acbl.org/virtual](#).** This is ACBL's page with info about all the games with pigmented points, including special events awarding silver and gold. It may seem a little overwhelming at first, but each section also comes with an FAQ.

Additional help

For help on the online mechanics, stop by one of the [Zoom help desks](#). For details about Virtual Clubs, including the club's official online name, ask your club manager.



[View this email in your browser](#)

Image 4 • Winter Wonderland Post



Image 5 • Teacher Feature Post



Image 6 • "Happy Halloween" meme

