

ACBL NATIONAL BOARD REPORT: SPRING 2026

The ACBL Board of Directors held its spring in-person meetings in St. Louis from Monday, February 23, through Thursday, February 26. The Board, Committees, and Task Forces continue to meet regularly online via Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

A QUICK WORD FROM YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Our recent Board meetings in Saint Louis were held with my colleague Cindy Shoemaker from Tucson (D17) as the new President—I was thankful to no longer be in charge. Two years were better than just the one one-year term, so I was pleased to have had two years to accomplish what needed doing during 2024 and 2025, but it is good to return to the role of “just” a Regional Director!

ACBL Board emphasis in 2026 is on ongoing and new membership recruitment and retention efforts. Many Units and Clubs have already received communications from Bronia about the changes she is making to the 5-5-5 Program and she is, of course, continuing her Unit and District Presidents’ Meetings. If you do not receive notices about these meetings, please be sure your Unit info is up-to-date on your website and that your secretary has sent contact info for any new Officers and Board Members to ACBL. Also, regarding attracting new members, if you are not familiar with the Sapphire Program (referenced briefly on page 3 of this report under “Engagement and Recognition”), this is an exciting venture that Bronia is continually refining—please see www.acbl.org/sapphires/.

Regarding tournaments, especially regionals, District Presidents and Tournament Coordinators/Chairs should have received notification from ACBL that an updated Guide is online. For those who are not the District President or a TC, the guide is available on the ACBL website. More information about this accomplishment is included in the section in this report on page 4 entitled “Tournament Task Force.” To access the Guide, visit acbl.org/tournament > click the yellow Tournament Management button > click the plus sign to the right of Tournament Planning Guides.

What follows is the standardized report that is produced thanks to the dedicated efforts of one of my Board colleagues (who also happens to be this year’s ACBL President) following our three “regular” Board meetings (held at the time of an NABC). Please let me know if you have any questions!

Thanks for reading...--Margot

FINANCE

The ACBL concluded the 2025 fiscal year in a stable position, with net assets increasing by \$1.367 million to a year-end total of \$12.58 million.

While operating revenue of \$17.98 million finished slightly below budget (primarily due to a \$1.1 million shortfall in club table fees) this was offset by strong NABC performance (+\$358k) and steady membership dues. Disciplined cost management across operations and administration resulted in total expenses finishing \$992k under budget, ensuring a positive bottom line.

Strategic reinvestment remains a priority, with \$640k dedicated to capital projects. Most of these funds (\$553k) were used to continue the modernization of the AS400 back-office system, securing the foundation of the membership and scoring infrastructure for the future.

MEMBERSHIP

The February 2026 report indicates a 5% decline in total membership, falling from 124,076 last year in February to 117,813.

This is accompanied by a slight dip in new member acquisition; year-to-date (YTD) sign-ups reached 701, down from 1,508 in 2025. However, these figures are balanced by a significant expansion in new guest memberships, which rose from 914 last year to 2,482 this year—a growth of 171.55%. This interest provides a path for growth as guest members transition to long-term commitment.

Strategic Alignment & Execution

For 2026, the primary strategic focus remains centered on membership growth and retention. The Board and Management are collaborating on a framework that synchronizes strategic oversight with the effective delivery of member-facing programs.

Growth Framework & Reporting

Management's approach to expanding the membership base focuses on the 5-5-5 program and specific membership pathways. Key strategic pillars include:

- **Retention-First Strategy:** Prioritizing the retention of existing members as the most sustainable engine for growth.
- **Funnel Expansion:** Broadening participation by opening the funnel to new players, ensuring a more diverse entry point into the organization.
- **Systems Integration:** Improving tracking by reconciling legacy and back-office reporting data to ensure outreach to lapsed members is based on accurate metrics.

Engagement & Recognition

Updates were provided on the Sapphire program, which serves as the primary vehicle for tracking and recognizing member engagement. Management highlighted several critical areas for program scaling:

- **The 60-Day Conversion Window:** Data indicates that engagement within the first 60 days is the single most critical factor in converting guest members into permanent members.
- **Grassroots Coordination:** Focus is on strengthening communication with clubs and units to improve recruiter tracking and scale mentor involvement.
- **Strategic Outreach:** Refined tracking to allow for more targeted communication with members at risk of lapsing, ensuring they remain connected to the community.

ONLINE ETHICAL OVERSIGHT

The ACBL continues to utilize EDGAR (Everyone Deserves a Game Above Reproach) to detect online cheating. Since December, the processing of approximately 20,000 additional player numbers was completed, with another 10,000 currently nearing completion. Two final large batches will be submitted to EDGAR to finish screening all individuals who have played online since 2020. These final runs and their subsequent processing are expected to conclude by May.

Processing Statistics & Outcomes

Since February 2024, 50,795 players have been submitted for screening and fully processed.

- **Total Screened:** 50,795.
- **Disciplinary Actions:** 1,812 players identified by EDGAR have been charged or issued Official Warnings.
- **Current Cheating Rate:** Approximately 3.5%. This figure includes members, nonmembers and inactive accounts.

The online cheating rate is expected to decrease as the pool of players subject to Player Memos (PM) for purported ethical violations has been fully screened. The estimated final rate is projected to be approximately 3%.

Disciplinary actions have included Official Warnings (498); Fast Track Discipline (FTD) (939); Negotiated Resolutions (NR) (54); Management Adjudications (10); Institute of Bridge

Arbitration (IBA) resolutions (44); with 41 resignations with charges pending, and 154 pending cases.

APPEALS & CHARGES COMMITTEE

The Committee Chair reported that there were no hearings and no Negotiated Resolutions (NR) or IBA Consent Offers to review. Two players were given a Suspension Pending Hearing (SPH) by Management, as they were repeat offenders (having previously served a suspension for online cheating). They subsequently resigned from the ACBL.

To view Hearing Reports and the Under Discipline List, go to the ACBL's ethics page: <https://www.acbl.org/ethics/>. This information is updated several times daily.

BRIDGE COMMITTEE

The Bridge Committee and Management are collaborating on a suite of operational and membership initiatives for 2026. These efforts prioritize the refinement of the Masterpoint system to rationalize the awarding of Masterpoints across all events and to motivate players to increase their participation in clubs, tournaments, and online; the restructuring of NABCs to create a championship experience for players of all levels, and the modernization of recruitment pathways for new players in support of our strategy and growth framework.

TOURNAMENT TASK FORCE

Efforts in 2024 and 2025 were a comprehensive evaluation of the ACBL competitive play landscape that focused on how to achieve appropriate tournament staffing, scheduling of tournaments, and schedules of events for regional tournaments of all sizes.

Working closely with Management, the flagship accomplishment of this task force in 2025 was the creation of an updated *Regional Tournament Planning Guide*. This comprehensive "nuts and bolts" guide includes checklists and best practices for sponsoring organizations and Tournament Chairs and is currently being distributed to district and unit host organizations.

Organizational changes reflecting input from this task force were enacted by Management. These changes redefined Tournament Director and staff responsibilities at headquarters and in the field to help achieve the ongoing objectives of improving the overall player experience while helping to ensure financial viability for both ACBL as a whole and tournament organizers.

To help ensure that recommendations and regulations are readily available to those who need them, the task force will continue to work closely with Management on the development of

Tournament *Trails*. This initiative aims to gather all tournament-level information into a centralized, user-friendly website space—like a Club Corner for tournaments—to improve accessibility for players, organizers, and teachers alike.

Also in 2026, this task force will continue its forward-looking efforts to ensure that the current mix of Sectionals, Regionals, and NABC-level events meet player needs. This will include understanding how Local Sectionals, Sectional-Tournaments-at-Clubs (STaCs), Non-life Master Sectionals and Regionals, and other hybrid tournaments contribute to encouraging player participation through ACBL. Key to this focus will be ensuring flexibility to accommodate geographic differences across ACBL while retaining the high standards of the ACBL brand.

REAL DEAL UPDATE

The Board received an update on The Real Deal digital initiative, which transitions the ACBL from a transactional gaming model to a community-centric Digital Clubhouse.

Utilizing the RealBridge platform, the program replicates the social interaction of in-person play through integrated audio and video, eliminating the isolation of traditional online bridge and providing a high-quality home club experience.

With over 1,200 unique players engaged in a single month, the initiative has already demonstrated strong interest. Current efforts focus on streamlining technical onboarding and developing teaching programs to build a long-term player pipeline.

For more information, visit: <https://www.acbl.org/portfolio/realdeal>.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Newly formed in 2026, the Committee is dedicated to enhancing procedures and optimizing communication across the ACBL. Initial efforts focus on the following initiatives, with additional priorities to be identified as the year progresses:

- **Organizational Synergy:** Refining the existing communication channels between the Board, Advisory Council (AC), and membership to ensure more consistent information sharing.
- **Member Engagement:** Implementing a structured process to collect and review member, club and teacher feedback.
- **Digital Neutrality:** ACBL now sanctions games across multiple online platforms, including BBO (Bridge Base Online), Funbridge, IntoBridge, OKbridge, RealBridge,

RSVP Bridge (new) and Shark Bridge. The Committee in collaboration with management will create a promotional framework that strives for equitable promotion and provides members with clear definitions of benefits.

- **AI Strategy:** Drafting policy language regarding AI-driven usage to ensure organizational guidelines remain current with this growing technology.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Committee introduced its 2026 work plan, which prioritizes the modernization of governing documents and procedural efficiency.

- **Codification Review:** Ongoing efforts to refine our regulations and organizational policy include:
 - Revising the membership chapter.
 - Relocating the awards and trophies section.
 - Revising the Committee section.
 - Reviewing and consolidating the unit and district chapters.
 - Updating international content and site selection procedures.
- **Bylaws Amendment:** A motion (253-BY01), providing the AC greater freedom to structure and eliminate committees, is progressing through the required publication and approval stages.
- **Language and Consistency:** Updates are being implemented across the Bylaws, Codification and Board Resource Manual to ensure gender-neutral language and uniform terminology.

Streamlining Election Procedures

Motion (261-GV01), placed on the consent calendar, optimizes the candidacy process by requiring all documentation to be received and acknowledged by the ACBL before a name is added to the official Elections Chart. It further clarifies that AC candidates are not required to submit a photo or biography, ensuring a more efficient and uniform application process.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Audit Committee report highlighted ongoing audit work and confirmed that no whistleblower complaints have been filed since 2022. Key updates included a review of fraud safeguards and follow-ups regarding conflict-of-interest forms. The Board formally received the report.

INTERNATIONAL

Motion (253-INT01) restructures financial contributions to international bridge organizations and World Bridge Federation (WBF) dues. With WBF discussions now concluded, implementation is set for March 31, 2026.

The motion directs the ACBL to maintain its \$50,100 annual contribution to the North American Bridge Federation (NABF) from operating funds. Additionally, it stipulates that specific entry charges from North American Bridge Championship+ (NABC+) events will be remitted to the NABF, earmarked specifically for Zone 2 WBF dues. This action is contingent upon the approval of a pending multi-party agreement between the NABF, the three Zone 2 national bridge organizations (NBOs) - the United States Bridge Federation (USBF), the Canadian Bridge Federation (CBF), the Federación Mexicana de Bridge (FMB) - the ACBL, and the WBF.

NABC SITE SELECTION & FISCAL OVERSIGHT

The NABC Site Selection Committee presented a comprehensive review of the current selection process, focusing on the infrastructure required for future NABCs. Key considerations included:

- **Operational Requirements:** Evaluating technical and logistical needs for modern tournament play.
- **Space & Hospitality:** Assessing venue capacity and hotel infrastructure to ensure high-quality player experiences.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Ensuring future sites reflect projected attendance trends and evolving event delivery models.

The Board reviewed a proposal for upcoming fall NABCs. Following a friendly amendment to adjust the second hosting year from 2036 to 2035, the Board unanimously approved Washington, D.C. as the host city for the fall NABCs in 2031 and 2035.

The Finance Committee provided a briefing on the long-term economic strategy tied to these selections. The discussion centered on:

- **Optimizing Venue Footprints:** A commitment to selecting facility sizes that remain proportional to projected attendance. This strategy is designed to protect margins and eliminate unnecessary overhead while maintaining a premium player experience.
- **Long-Range Budgeting & Risk Management:** By securing contracts for 2030 and beyond, the ACBL mitigates the risk of rising venue costs and provides a stable framework for future fiscal planning.

APPOINTMENTS

Three-Year Term (end of spring 2026 NABC – through end of spring 2029 NABC)

- Competition and Conventions Committee: Sabine Auken (D24), Owen Lien (D7)
- Hall of Fame Committee: Iftikhar Baqai (D23), Bart Bramley (D16), Kerri Sanborn (D9)
- Ethical Oversight Committee: Cheri Bjerkan (D13), Marty Fleisher (D24), John Fout (D24), Rick Roeder (D22), Kevin Wilson (D7)
- ACBL Disciplinary Committee: Bob Glasson (D3), Christal Henner (D24), Eric Stoltz (D20), Jeff Brown (D22)

Five-Year Term (spring 2026 NABC – spring 2031 NABC)

- Laws Commission: Doug Couchman (D17), Howard “Howie” Weinstein (D9)

One-Year Term (Effective February 23, 2026)

- NABC Seeding Committee: David Berkowitz (D9, Chair)

Masterpoint Committee Appointments

The following appointments are effective from the end of the spring 2026 NABC through the end of the spring 2027 NABC (one-year term):

- Presidential Appointments: Dennis Carman (D5), Jeff Overby (D8)
- At-large Presidential Appointments: Bob Heller (D7) and Lee Lin (D23)
- Management Appointments: Rob Maier and David Metcalf; Sol Weinstein (non-voting advisor)

Kyle Rockoff (D17) was appointed to a three-year term, effective from the end of the spring 2026 NABC through the end of the spring 2029 NABC.