

Best Practice for County Associations

Summary

A developing (work in progress) document created by Counties for Counties who may wish to adopt it fully, or in part, and who may wish to amend and/or contribute to its development. In addition to this document there are also supporting 'work in progress' documents available via links where specified.

This document is produced by a group of County representatives for the benefit of all Counties. It is hoped that whatever the nature of your County Organisation you will find some ideas within it helpful in the management of your County's affairs.

Section 1 - Introduction and Aims of this Paper

Section 2 - Aspects of Volunteering for County Associations – contains suggestions which might aid the recruitment of volunteers

Section 3 - Best Practice for County Associations - covers practices that have already proved successful in some Counties under the following headings:

- a) Transparency and Communications with Clubs and Members
- b) Association Management
- c) Bridge Development
- d) Succession planning
- e) Best Behaviour at Bridge
- f) How do we get more people playing Bridge
- g) Youth Development
- h) Being, and Feeling, Part of the English Bridge Union
- i) A practical guide and help to those clubs working to rent/purchase their own Premises

Section 4 - Measurement of County Performance - looks at County Associations setting themselves performance measures, explaining why this might be a good idea and suggesting some areas that it may be appropriate to measure.

Best Practice for County Associations

1. Introduction and Aims

- a) Having disbanded the National Club Committee, the EBU discussed at the County Chairmen's meeting in June 2013 the need to 'ensure an effective communications and development programme is formulated' (letter dated August 22nd 2013 from Sally Budgen to County Club Representatives).
- b) At the EBU shareholders meeting in April 2014 the EBU announced that a 'National County Working Group (NCWG) had been set up by the Board to focus on County development.' A structure of five Regional County Working Groups (RCWG's) had been formed, each having two representatives on the NCWG.
- c) The Terms of Reference and structure for the NCWG were agreed by the EBU Board at their meetings in August 2013 and April 2014. The aim was to focus on County development, the key objectives of which would include communications and relationships with Counties, Clubs, Members and potential Members. The objectives to be explored would include a volunteer recruitment programme, a framework for volunteers to work within, and annual measurable objectives for the County in its various roles.
- d) One could summarise what we are trying to achieve as:-
 - a) Encouraging Counties to work closer together and to learn from each other what works well.
 - b) For each County to set itself, and measure, a performance standard for delivery to Members.
 - c) For Counties to recognise the importance of providing a baseline standard for all bridge players (Members)
- e) This document concentrates on best practice and its measurement

2. Aspects of Volunteering for County Associations

- a) At the NCWG meeting in October 2014 the meeting split up into three topic discussions. The minutes identify the outcome of Topic C as to 'identify best practice for a County Association, including role descriptors and skill experiences required; supported by a Regional Officer to assist with training, and the promotion of a volunteer get a volunteer scheme'.
- b) County Associations are all very different from each other; measured in terms of number of Clubs, Members, events organised, geographical areas, financial assets. The nature and amount of work undertaken by volunteers can vary widely from County to County.
- c) County Associations operate with no salaried staff support. Volunteers working in other charitable or non-profit organisations, like the EBU, have salaried staff to undertake activities such as minute taking, booking venues, financial matters, organising calendars, undertaking research, and sharing the load in numerous other ways.

- d) County Association volunteers need to have a good deal of know-how and initiative. County Association volunteers need to be able to tackle and solve real problems and issues with, currently, little support from the central EBU.
- e) Players volunteering to help run County Associations will, in general, only undertake activities with which they are familiar or feel competent to undertake. Volunteers will not undertake tasks which they either do not want to do, or feel unable to complete. Any attempt to straightjacket volunteers to conform to a particular work pattern are likely to fail.
- f) The need, therefore, to support volunteers with initial training and Regional Officer support was thus seen as essential by the topic group.
- g) The most successful volunteer motivation occurs when an office holder is successful in achieving something which further enhances the activities of the Association. Setting County targets will help in this respect. Other tangible rewards, such as free entry to Association events, free entry to the Summer Congress for a volunteer after two years' service, loan of County equipment to a volunteer's club, etc, should be considered.
- h) In the recruitment of volunteers it might be helpful to compile a matrix chart highlighting skill experiences, or career experiences, which might be required for particular County positions. Or, when discussing a candidate for a particular position, to identify a short list of characteristics to look for.
- i) Two draft documents exist in support of this area:
 - a. A schedule identifying the main skills required of officers performing different roles – click [here](#).
 - b. A draft letter to existing volunteers to invite them to help find others - click [here](#).

3. Best Practice for County Associations

a) Transparency and Communications with Clubs and Members

- i) Minutes of Association AGM's and EGM's published on County website.
- ii) Notices for open meetings published on County website.
- iii) Minutes of Association Executive/Management Committee meetings published on County website (with confidential items removed).
- iv) Publication of an online and/or paper newsletter on County bridge matters.
- v) Effective two-way communications between Associations and affiliated Clubs by:
 - a) An annual meeting with invited Club Officials, with agenda items covering EBU, Association and Club raised matters.
 - b) Arranging for at least one Executive/Management Committee Officer to visit and play at a session at every affiliated Club at least once per year to either, meet the Club Committee, talk to Members collectively, or listen to any issues during play.
 - c) Encouraging Clubs, and their Members, to contact the County Association when needing help with resolving disciplinary or other rulings; finding teachers, or tournament directors, and other matters connected with running their Club.

- d) Allowing all affiliated Clubs space on the Association website to highlight their club details, and to promote special events or publish results.
- e) Maintaining a list of all unaffiliated Clubs, circles, groups, etc, and listing these on the Association website, together with giving them any advice that they might request
- f) Keeping unaffiliated clubs informed of Association events, especially any designed to attract non-EBU Members.

b) Association Management

- i) Association Governance is achieved by use of an appropriate Constitution – the EBU provide a model Constitution, and advice on County Constitutions.
- ii) ii) Associations ensure that adequate Safeguarding Policies exist where necessary – the EBU Youth Care and Safety may be used as a model for Counties.
- iii) iii) Association costs kept to a minimum by using modern communication and publishing methods; securing sponsorship for special events, the website or newsletter; and spreading the workload amongst all Executive/Management Committee Members, and others, where necessary.
- iv) iv) Executive/Management Committee membership comprising a representative cross-section of the membership (eg geographical spread, all levels of bridge playing abilities (*one does not need to be an expert bridge player to be an outstanding and effective bridge administrator*), active in club activities, etc.
- v) Organising weekday, weekend and daytime events that will appeal to all grades of membership. As well as open pairs and team events these might include:
 - a. Invitational events for expert players.
 - b. Events for improving players (for example with expert players excluded via Masterpoint/NGS ranking), County squad membership, and B flight events.
 - c. Play with an expert, or pro-am events.
 - d. Bridge social events, such as celebratory parties, cafe bridge.
 - e. Events for seniors.
 - f. Heats of National EBU events.
- vi) Publicising these events on the website, by newsletter and by direct communication by email to Club Secretaries for onward forwarding to their Members.
- vii) Direct communication by email to Members on request and to County teachers if the event is appropriate.
- viii) Establish a transparent selection procedure with trials where feasible for representative inter-County and National events.
- ix) Set up working groups of 3-4 Committee Members and others to investigate topics, or issues, and charge them with suggesting remedies.
- x) Receive regular reports from Shareholders and determine whether Shareholders are delegates and, therefore, vote as directed by the County Executive/Management Committee, or are representatives and, therefore, vote according to their conscience. If the former then does the County mandate them on specific forthcoming issues.

- xi) Executive/Management Committee to set itself targets with timescales and reporting on the measurement of its targets to the Clubs and Members. Targets to be set by Counties could relate to growth in Membership, Clubs, students, etc, or financial, BBB, interaction with the community, etc.
- xii) Giving support, including financial support, to County teams representing the County in National events such as the Tollemache, Pachabo, Corwen, and Garden Cities.
- xiii) Awarding prize monies for County events, commensurate with the cost of staging the event and the need to purchase new equipment.

c) Bridge Development

- i) Maintain a list of all County bridge teachers and courses on the Association website.
- ii) ii) Encourage and help Clubs to organise feeder sections, with supervised play for beginners to run alongside more formal teaching sessions.
- iii) Attend fresher days at Universities to try to establish activities under the supervision of a local affiliated Club.
- iv) Assist Clubs in organising a mentoring scheme for players who wish to progress via one-to-one, or joint sessions.
- v) Run weekend days, or summer schools for improving players, on particular topics within bridge, with invited tutors/lecturers.
- vi) Run lectures by invited noted experts.
- vii) Raise the profile of bridge in the wider community by regular articles, for instance, in the local County press, and by publicising events on radio and TV.

d) Succession Planning

- i) Consider where appropriate the rotation of Committee Member responsibilities every 3-5 years, to ensure efficient coverage of activities as Members retire.
- ii) ii) Ascertain from all current Committee Members their own aspirations.
- iii) Accept that calls for Members to put themselves forward for election are likely to fail, and thus adopt a pro-active approach.
- iv) Maintain a confidential list of Members whom it is felt would have the right knowledge and experience to serve on the Executive/Management Committee.
- v) Ask these Members to assist in helping with specific activities, and get them involved in working groups or routine activities.
- vi) Produce Role Descriptions relative to the County's needs. People may be prepared to take on responsibilities when they can see what is involved.

e) Best Behaviour at Bridge

- i) Focusing on the causes of bad behaviour, as well as having clear procedures for dealing with it.
- ii) ii) Leaflets outlining an individual's responsibilities in relation to Good Ethics and BBB placed on tables at County events.
- iii) Tournament Directors highlighting an individual's responsibilities at the start of play at County events.

- iv) Constitutions of County Associations include a comprehensive detailed section on 'A Schedule of Disciplinary Procedures'. The EBU might be asked to comment on these, which should also be published by the Association, eg on their website.
- v) Any necessary Conduct or Disciplinary Committee to be selected by the Association from a panel of Members not involved in the incident.
- vi) This panel should include Members who have had previous experience of personnel, grievance, or disciplinary matters, for instance in their careers, within the armed services, police force, civil service, legal affairs, etc, as well as Members with a good knowledge of the game. A request for volunteers as panel Members could be made to the membership, via the website, for example.
- vii) Consider whether the outcome of disciplinary matters should be published to the Members via the website.
- viii) One-to-one discussions with players whose ethics, or behaviour, have been questioned, but no specific complaint made.

f) How do we get more people playing bridge

- i) Consider your target market (eg 40-60 year olds).
- ii) Try to create a more attractive and widespread image of bridge clubs and players.
- iii) Make bridge classes easier to find.
- iv) Provide more flexible and quicker learning, or fast track lessons.
- v) Promote the positive difference that bridge can make to one's life as we get older (social and health).
- vi) Contact local adult colleges and help them organise bridge education within the schedule of their courses.
- vii) A draft paper on this topic is available [here](#).

g) Youth Development

- i) With the support of local Bridge Clubs help to organise mini-bridge sessions for children in primary schools.
- ii) Organise inter-school activity for secondary schools within County towns.
- iii) Support, or initiate, if necessary, bridge activities within local Colleges and Universities for both students and staff.

h) Being, and Feeling, Part of the English Bridge Union

- i) Develop an ethos of the EBU is not them, it is us.
- ii) Ensure that new Initiatives being proposed by the EBU are fully explained to the County, Clubs, and Members.
- iii) Provide feedback to the EBU on new ideas and initiatives.
- iv) Ensure that the views of the County, Clubs, and Members are collated and that the EBU is fully updated on what Members believe is necessary to promote bridge. Raise specific issues, or complaints, from Clubs with the relevant EBU staff.

- v) Support the charity 'English Bridge Education and Development'. This might involve fund raising for the charity, as well as spreading the word on its activities.
- vi) Use (and encourage Clubs to use) The Bridge Warehouse (the EBU's shop) for their stationery and other purchases (and complain if the prices are higher than elsewhere).

i) A practical guide and help to those clubs working to rent/purchase their own premises

- i) When required help Clubs to both produce a Business Plan and to register as a charity within the Charity Commission (Chartered Incorporated Organisation).
- ii) Use the County website and newsletters, etc, to seek Member financial support, and keep Members informed of progress.
- iii) Consider using County reserves to become a sponsor or debenture holder.
- iv) A draft paper in support of this topic is available [here](#).

4. Measurement of County Performance

'When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind. ' (Lord Kelvin, British scientist, 1824-1907)

- a) **The previous section shared some best practices from around the Counties.** This section looks at how a County might measure how well it is doing on an ongoing basis.
- b) **Counties vary greatly in their demography and their priorities.** The best measurement scheme for each County will depend on its own circumstances. We stress that there is no obligation on any County to adopt any of these ideas, although we hope that many will find them useful.
- c) **Measurement provides evidence which tells a County** whether (or not) it is:
 - Performing as expected in its day-to-day operations.
 - Dealing adequately with its known issues.
 - Well positioned for growth and improvement.
 - Vulnerable to any emerging threats

Counties are advised to measure the fewest number of things that will do the job and to be ruthless when whittling the list down. This eases the burden of measurement and avoids diluting the messages contained in the measurements.

- a) **The first question a County should ask itself is 'what are the main areas we wish to monitor?'** Only when this has been done should you drill down and consider how best to measure each area.

As stated in the Introduction, each County must choose its own list, but here is an example:

'Our County' needs to know that:

- i) Our **membership** is growing and appreciative of what we do for them
- ii) Our **Clubs** feel involved in, supportive and appreciative of what we do for their Members
- iii) Our **financial status** is healthy and expected to remain so
- iv) Our **playing strength** is growing at all levels
- v) We have **enough suitable volunteers** to run the County now and into the future
- vi) Our **competitions** (league and tournaments) are well-supported and well-run
- vii) We have a healthy **relationship with the EBU** which benefits our Members
- viii) Any **projects** we have underway are progressing as planned
- ix) We have identified and are countering any **threats** to our operation

b) **The next step is to decide what can be measured which will reassure that each area is healthy.** Once again each County must choose its own set, and should aim to measure the fewest number of things. Here is an example:

Area of Concern	Indicator to Measure	Notes
Membership	Quarterly growth over 2 years	
	Annual Satisfaction Survey	Quantitative: How happy? Qualitative: What should we stop? What should we start? What should we do differently?
Relationship with Clubs	Percentage 1 on 1 chats held	
	Simple survey during chats	Qualitative: What should we stop? What should we start? What should we do differently?
	UM Fees low versus benchmark	County Efficiently Run?
Financial Status	P&L	
	Balance Sheet	
	Cash-Flow	
	Asset protection & renewal*	*Provision for replacement
Playing Strength	Number of new players	Health of Teaching in County
	'Above-County' performance	Caps, Wins, Merits, etc
	Numbers at top NGS levels	
Volunteers	Vacancies	(should be nil)
	Spread of workload	
	Succession Planning	Key-post next holders in place?
Competitions	% Members participating	
	Growth/decline by comp.	
	Participation by NGS 8 & Below	
Relationship with EBU	Participation on Comps & Sims	
	Shareholder & Chair participation	
	Attendance at EBU TD training	

Updated: 8th June 2015 (NCWG)

Projects	In budget	
	Checkpoints all hit on time	
	Scope still as planned	
Threats	Discussed each meeting	