



# ORGANIZING A Youth Bridge Program



*Setting Up  
for Success*



**NEVER FORGET**

*Playing bridge is supposed to be fun  
Teaching bridge is ALSO supposed to be fun!*

The most important factor when organizing a youth bridge program is to ensure that you, the people involved in the program and the students have the same goal. A realistic goal.

Our GOAL was to introduce thousands of children to the game and give them a basic foundation that would allow them to play for the rest of their lives.

Our HOPE was that some of them would become as enthralled, interested, and love the game as much as we (and thousands other players) love bridge.

Ensure that everyone involved in your program is focused on the same endgame.

These programs take time to create and time to develop to their full potential. Even in adult programs you find that some love the game, some like it and some move on to something else. Youth bridge will be the same. Know that you will have a series of 'trial and error' and some growing pains. Understand that it will not happen in a week, a month or (maybe) a year.

Organizing a program:

- Location
- Volunteers
- Supplies
- Finances
- Marketing
- Administration
- Teachers

## **LOCATIONS**

**Locations for Classes** - There are many options for holding classes. Schools, Churches, recreation centers and libraries, as well as bridge centers. I know of one teacher who held classes at the clubhouse of the homeowner association. Another held neighborhood classes in her home (be careful of trying this due to potential liability issues).

Parents of the students taught in bridge centers and at summer camps will become some of your most consistent contacts for introducing bridge to the schools in your area. One of the largest retention of students can come from the summer camps. Think 2 hours a day, for one week. Introducing them to the basics and follow up with weekly, year-round weekend classes.

Schools are excellent locations for clubs; however it may be difficult for parents and students to make the transition from school club to bridge club.

**Locations for Storing Supplies** - A central location easily available to your teachers is the most viable option. Think bridge club. Conditioned storage room with a lock and multiple keys. Have a checklist available of what a teacher will need to conduct a class. Have a sign-out sheet in the storage room so you know who has what supplies.

**Locations for Meetings, Finance, Administration** - A bridge club is best, a neutral location. The second choice is someone's home. Realize that if an individual is holding all your documents and information and that person becomes ill....you have lost everything. Back-up all your financial documents, business documents and meeting minutes in the 'cloud' with access for at least two people.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

**Volunteers to help with logistics** - moving, storing, ordering supplies for classes and games can be very labor intensive and many of your teachers may not be physically capable of handling heavy supplies.

**Volunteers for fundraising** - youth programs are expensive. Look for someone who is interested in your efforts, vested in your success and who knows how to ask for money AND organize fundraisers.

**Volunteers to market and advertise your program** - flyers, posters, pictures, websites, Instagram, Facebook. You need to be visible so that you can build on your success.

**Volunteers for administrative issues** - A CPA is not needed to create and keep a list of all the students in your various classes and programs. You need an administrative assistant. Someone who is detailed, organized and meticulous. If you are in the US, ACBL requires specific paperwork at specific

times to ship supplies and pay teaching stipends. Many teachers you find will be great teachers....but perhaps not so great a getting their paperwork done.

**Volunteers to help teachers with classes-** If you have large classes (more than 2-3 tables) you will need volunteers to help your teachers. Especially the first few weeks of classes, students will not only need help with bridge concepts but the physical knowledge of how to use a bidding box, 'fan' a hand of cards, keeping the cards duplicate style. Finding volunteers willing to let the 'teacher, teach' and then provide back-up at the table (based only on what was taught) can be extremely difficult. This is very important and may require you to mix and match teachers/volunteers until you find who works best with who.

## **SUPPLIES**

**Teaching Supplies** – Every class will need textbooks, playing cards, duplicate boards, bidding boxes, directional table mats and card holders (for younger students). For a class of 12 students the cost will be ~\$250. The students can 'make' their own card holders (it can be an art project using a tinfoil box, construction paper, old cards and crayons or markers), but the other supplies will have to be purchased. DO NOT use old, dirty or broken left over supplies.

**Snacks** – Every bridge player loves snacks. Be careful of having snacks that contain foods which many people have allergic reactions to (i.e. peanuts).

**Sign-up Sheets etc.** – Obtain full information about your students whenever possible. Name, age, email, parents phone number, email, any allergies or physical conditions needing special attention, etc. NEVER hold a camp or class at a non-school location without the information you need to contact a parent or guardian in case of injury, illness or melt-down.

## **ADMINISTRATION & FINANCES**

**Legal** – Do you have a legal standing? If you are a corporation or a non-profit there will be legal steps you are required to follow. Governmental requirements. In the US liability insurance is something required by many schools, churches, or recreation centers. Contracts with your teachers are necessary for your and their understanding of what is required and what they will be paid.

**Financial**– A detailed account should be kept of your income and expenses. A

record (and reporting) of money paid to your teachers and others should be submitted.

**General**– If you are receiving money from any players, people and/or organizations; issue a general reporting of income vs. expenses and (at least) every year a report of successes, failures, and future plans. It does not have to be as detailed as \$10 to Kim Smith but be transparent about your organization if you want to keep your donors!

## **MARKETING**

**Visibility** – Logos, websites, names, flyers, posters, newsletters, etc. are how you become visible to the public and (largely) how you keep your donors and funding. The organization may not care if they get recognition for their hard work, but recognition IS how you keep your existing funding and raise more. Find someone who understands (perfect would be someone ‘in the business’) how to reach the general public AND the bridge playing public. Network. Network. Network.

## **TEACHERS**

**Credentials and experience** – Not all bridge players are good teachers. Not all bridge teachers are good with youngsters. Find the mix of a good bridge teacher who likes (and has experience) teaching children. You do not need to be a good bridge player to teach beginning bridge. Much more important is to be able to bring a complex subject down to the basics.

**Material** – Find (or create) the beginning bridge teaching material you want to use for your youth program.

**Training** – Create a training program for your youth bridge teachers to understand that material and teach it as the first stages of bridge. This allows the groups of kids to be able to play with each other at your camps, games, and classes outside of their main class. (Once you reach more advanced levels of bridge, you can (if desired) let your teachers branch out a little.)

**Team Teaching** – The majority of teachers who take on the task of youth bridge are older, retired and have free time to donate to the endeavor. Those

same teachers are the ones who would like to travel, visit grandkids etc. Having two or three teachers join to teach takes the pressure off having to be at the class every week. Someone gets sick, no problem. Someone wants to go to Cabo, no problem. The others can take over for them and the kids keep learning from teachers they already know and with whom they are comfortable.

**Vetting** – In the US (due to security and child safety concerns), volunteers at schools, recreation centers etc. must go through official background checks. The Boy Scouts have an online “Youth Protection Training” . I recommend any volunteers or teachers who will be in direct contact with the students, go through that or some like training.

**Payment**– Write it down. What you expect. What they expect. Paid/Unpaid? Their duties. Your duties. Be clear upfront so everyone knows what to expect and what their responsibilities entail.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Unit or club run organization may have greater stability and ongoing success as much of the success of youth programs relies on a strong, active, and growing support structure.



Patty Tucker is from Atlanta, Georgia. Having learned to play bridge at age eleven, Patty has extensive experience in playing and teaching bridge.

Elected to the ACBL Hall of Fame in 2019, Patty is a Grand Life Master, American Bridge Teacher Association Master Teacher and ACBL Best Practices Accredited Teacher/Trainer.

She has been recognized by ACBL for her work with youth bridge and as a volunteer at the local and national level. She was named the ACBL Honorary Member in 2016 and the ACBL Goodwill Member of the Year in 2011.

Her love for the game of bridge and the people she meets is apparent as she teaches this fascinating game.



# Bridge with Patty!

Bridge with Patty

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