

**NEWCASTLE BRIDGE CLUB**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Newcastle Bridge Club (NBC) is the largest bridge venue in the Hunter Region. It is affiliated with the NSWBA and the Australian Bridge Federation (ABF), under whose guidelines it operates. NBC has approximately 250-300 members and offers duplicate sessions over six days each week. It endeavours to provide a friendly and competitive environment for all players.

This document aims to create a forward-looking Plan. Since the priorities and environment in which the Club operates will continue to change, it is important that this plan is reviewed every year to ensure that its strategies are still relevant and outline the best direction forward to meet the goals.

### 1.2 Document Structure

*Chapter 2* identifies the various groups of people that make up the NBC community. It identifies each group's aims and focus. This information is included to ensure that everyone is catered for.

*Chapter 3* looks at the positives and negatives that face NBC. This information helps to pinpoint where challenges might come from, how best to address those challenges, and possibilities for growth.

*Chapter 4* defines the focus areas and the key strategies and initiatives that are required to achieve the strategic aims.

*Chapter 5* sets out an indicative timeframe for those initiatives, thereby establishing priorities.

## 2.0 OUR MEMBERS

### 2.1 Introduction

NBC recognises four distinct groups of people. In this chapter we define the groups and look at what they want out of a bridge club. This information is important to keep in mind as we develop the Club's strategic direction.

It is worth noting that those groups are not mutually exclusive. People may identify with more than one or may identify with a different group over time as priorities change.

### 2.2 Social Players

This group comprises the bulk of the NBC membership and regular attendance.

Players in this group are understood to have a number of key desires, which include:-

- Provide a pleasant and comfortable playing area, which has a positive ambience. The clubroom environment is a very high priority since bridge for this group is viewed first and foremost as a social activity.

- Cater for our senior members by making sure the club rooms provide for their particular needs.
- Provide opportunities for players to improve, i.e. intermediate lessons.
- Ensure that everyone who wants to play at a session can find a partner (and is encouraged to form a regular partnership).
- Provide opportunities for those members to win Red masterpoints.

Members in this group attend for both social and competitive aspects of the game and both components should be catered for.

### **2.3 Competitive Players**

These are NBC players who regularly compete at National events and local Congresses. Those members generally attend the sessions that provide the opportunity to compete in a challenging environment. We also have a number of players who are improving their skills and want to compete against the best the NBC has to offer. In order to cater for those players, the following components have been identified:-

- A consistent offering of attractive multi-week events.
- Recognition of achievements by the players, both in NBC events and in events of other clubs.
- A variety of events to maintain player interest.

### **2.4 Beginners and Advancers**

Attracting and retaining new members are vital for the Club's continuing success. One very important way to do this is to grow the bridge playing population by introducing new people to the game. NBC aims to hold two beginner courses each year, each of which lasts approximately eight weeks. After the beginner courses, the Club provides a variety of duplicate games for new players to progress in the game.

Support for players in this group may include:-

- Supervised sessions to continue the learning process.
- The Club to provide regular partners of similar standard for duplicate games.
- A regular and attractive program to help players improve, including lessons, guest speakers, mentoring and sessions to work on partnership understandings.
- A friendly and welcoming environment, starting from teaching through to their introduction and participation in regular duplicate sessions.

The key factor is that members in this group will learn and progress at different rates, and it is important to cater for everyone.

## 2.5 Youth Players

Youth players can be introduced to the game either through university clubs, friends, or bridge playing parents. Although youth players generally start as beginners, they deserve to be recognised as a special category, for two reasons. First is that those players will often play elsewhere, either at university or in a separate social environment, either online or face to face. This means that NBC will fill a different role for them with respect to the game of bridge. Secondly, younger players frequently improve extremely rapidly and tend to seek out the competitive aspects of the game rather than social. Practically they share characteristics of the previous two groups and in particular they tend to look for:-

- Highly competitive games.
- Instruction and mentoring at an intermediate level, even for less experienced players.
- An accepting and positive environment, but not necessarily a social one.

This category is an opportunity for NBC as the Club currently has no such players.

## 3.0 OUR POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

### 3.1 Positives

The Club has the advantage of owning and controlling its own premises, we are financially stable and we have a large membership base on which to draw both for players and for skills. Many long-time members continue to volunteer time and effort in order to improve the service we offer. Finally, we have a core of very highly skilled players, directors, teachers and administrators available within the Club.

Strength	Comments
Location	Broadmeadow is conveniently positioned
Financial	NBC is financially stable
People	Voluntary labour is available for the Club to draw on
Specific Purpose Club	Furniture for each session is permanently set-up
Membership Numbers	NBC has good membership numbers and capacity to grow

### 3.2 Negatives

As in most bridge communities worldwide, our members profile is ageing, which means that we have an obligation both to cater for their needs and to identify ways to attract new players to the game. NBC has not yet made the most of resources in a number of areas, particularly marketing, new technology and support for advancing players.

Weakness	Comments
Somewhat Staid	New ideas take time to be assimilated and implemented

Age Profile of Members	Is this real or perceived? Review of this item may be useful
Marketing	The Club needs to target particular groups within the community
Online Presence	The NBC website needs continual review
Site Car Parking	On site parking is limited and road side parking difficult in the immediate vicinity
Image of Bridge Playing	There are concerns about attitudes and nastiness exhibited by some players
Incomplete Teaching Program	NBC needs visiting experts, lessons for advancing and experienced players and mentoring
Poor Retention Rate of New Players	There are a large number of learners who do not become regular players
Partnership Arrangements Mechanism	Consider alternative methods for matching players
Ageing Building	It is a plain building despite fairly recent renovation

### 3.3 Opportunities

Opportunities as listed identify a number of potential areas from which to draw new members, support the current members and increase the quality of services to everyone at the Club.

Opportunities	Comments
Introduce New Members	Encourage use of name tags, particularly where newer members are likely to be in attendance
Tap into different groups	Reach out to other community groups such as U3A, Mothers Groups or Probus, offering our activity as an extension of their program
Baby boomers worrying about Alzheimer's	Bridge by reputation offers one type of solution for newly retired people looking for challenging interests
Newcastle University	The university may be a resource for youth players

### 3.4 Threats

External threats to the NBC are shown in the following table. The game of bridge is facing a number of challenges due to other pastimes and other avenues for bridge players. We need to investigate how to address those threats and whether they can be turned into opportunities.

Threats	Comments
Online Bridge	Players may be spending more time online in preference to club sessions
Evening participation is going down	Should the timing of sessions be reviewed? What other initiatives could be trialled?
Other clubs	Other clubs with lower overheads or with a welcoming environment may take away existing and potential members
Image of bridge	Bridge is seen as a pastime for older people
Alternate games and activities	The proliferation of alternate games and activities, especially for youth, means that there are competing interests
Aging profile of membership	Older (retired) players are less inclined to attend evening sessions

## 4.0 FOCUS AREAS

### 4.1 Key Result Areas

These areas are those in which opportunities for improvement can be found. Although they are presented separately, real progress at the Club will almost always incorporate efforts in more than one category.

The key result areas are listed below. Opportunities to improve performance have been identified in each area.

- **Building** - both the interior and exterior physical premises
- **Social Aspects** - the club atmosphere and offerings to members
- **Recruitment, Publicity and Marketing** - how we attract new members
- **Improvement Pathways** - to help our members improve throughout their bridge career
- **Internal Communications** - how we communicate with the members
- **Competition** - for all players in the Club
- **Financial Performance** - maintain funding flow at an appropriate level
- **Administration** - are current procedures appropriate.

### 4.2 Building

The target in this key result area is to *"make the Club more welcoming by bringing its appearance and facilities into the 21<sup>st</sup> century"*. The Club needs to ensure that facilities cater for our membership and to make it visually attractive to new members. Over recent years NBC has accumulated funds to allow for improvements to this area.

Specific focus areas are discussed below:-

#### **4.2.1 Alternate Premises**

NBC is conveniently located at Broadmeadow but parking is increasingly a problem for larger attendance sessions. Improvement alternatives are:-

- Specification of requirements for acceptable relocation should be developed.
- Acquire an adjoining property. Feasibility should be prepared.
- Make alternate car parking arrangements, i.e. car pooling encouraged, basketball centre.

#### **4.2.2 Building and Grounds**

- Ensuring the premises is secure.
- Maintaining a sound, well drained car parking area.
- Building alterations designed to modernise the external appearance, i.e. larger windows, rendered walls.

#### **4.2.3 Main Playing Area**

Consider enhancing natural lighting by installing larger windows.

#### **4.2.4 Office and Internal Areas**

The office area needs revision to cope with the additional demand for Board Dealing.

The entrance area could be updated in order to improve the initial impression for people entering the Club.

#### **4.2.5 Facilities**

Ongoing maintenance and improvements to the facilities must be included in the planning process.

- Planned replacement of items in the kitchens and playing requisites.
- Upgrades to the computers, sound systems and similar equipment.

These items should be addressed as funds allow and requirements arise.

### **4.3 Social Aspects**

The aim of this key result area is to *encourage a more enjoyable atmosphere*. Initiatives in this area will foster the bridge playing community and meet differing needs of our members.

Specific initiatives are outlined below.

#### **4.3.1 Improve Table Etiquette**

Player behaviour at the tables is a factor in people's enjoyment during sessions. The NBC should identify ways to regularly promote better table etiquette among its members, to remind all players of their obligations to each other, so that we can better enjoy the sessions. A range of methods could be trialled over time, including newsletter items, notices at the Clubs and director announcements.

#### **4.3.2 Social Events**

NBC can enhance member enjoyment by offering post or mid-session BBQ's or other initiatives designed to create a social atmosphere.

#### **4.4 Recruitment, Publicity and Marketing**

The focus of this key result area is to *"increase the number of people joining and playing at the Club"*.

There is a large population of potential players that have not yet tried the game or who have played briefly years before. Identifying and tapping into that faction to grow the bridge community will increase the stability and long term viability of the NBC.

NBC has the facilities to support substantially greater playing members. Achieving this may make viable professional administration for the Club.

##### **4.4.1 Develop and Implement a Marketing Strategy**

In order to promote the Club and attract new members, a cohesive and consistent marketing strategy is required. Ideas include:-

- Publicity in free magazines
- Targeted letter box drops
- Advertise in seniors publications
- Target university
- Offer free games to prospective members

Once this strategy is developed it will need to be implemented. Elements of other key result areas will be integral to the success of marketing, such as improvement pathways for players and enhancement of the club premises.

##### **4.4.2 Retention of Beginner Players**

At the moment NBC has difficulty converting people who attend beginner classes to regular session play. Research needs to be undertaken to find out why those people do not continue.

Reasons may include:-

- Bridge is simply not the right activity for that person.
- There is no clear path for players after beginner lessons.
- New players do not have partners.

NBC needs to introduce participants in the beginner courses to transitional arrangements within the club environment. This should be done in the latter stages of the courses and be reinforced for at least two weeks.

The Club needs to maintain a regular visible way for people to find partners for duplicate sessions. This is particularly important for players new to either the Club or the game itself, but should be available to all members.

#### **4.5 Improvement Pathways**

The primary aim in this key result area is to develop and implement strategies to help all players improve their skills.

In order to achieve this aim, the Club needs to identify improvement pathways for players, plan how best to assist players in achieving their next goals, and deliver the assistance. Options that might be of interest to our newer members include formal lessons, supervised play, organised post session discussions, sessions to work on partnership agreements, a mentoring program and promoting the bridge library.

Specific initiatives are outlined in the sections below:-

##### **4.5.1 Develop Improvement Pathways**

The first step is to plan comprehensive pathways for people who want to improve. This will identify specific goals for players at different levels of learning and interest, and will define what lessons, structured sessions and other help the Club will provide to help players get there.

The improvement pathways will be available to all club members and will form the framework for classes and other sessions.

##### **4.5.2 Opportunities for Intermediate Players**

Intermediate players are defined as someone who has been playing regularly for at least two years and is competitive in a club session, understands the basis of their bidding system and of card play, and wants to learn more about the logic of the game. Initiatives might be lessons on specific bidding and/or play aspects or short duplicate sessions with structured discussion after play, or similar ideas.

#### **4.6 Internal Communications**

The focus in this key result area is to *develop effective communication between members, and the committee, and ensure members know what is happening*". Several specific initiatives have been identified for investigation.

##### **4.6.1 Website**

Ensure the website is continually updated to provide accurate and current information.

#### **4.6.2 Communication Channels**

The NBC requires a regular way to communicate with its members to let everyone know about what is going on, special events, and other news. Currently, the main method of communication is via pre-session announcement or notices posted on white boards. This system is prone to omission or to be forgotten/ignored. A regular newsletter is in place and assists important communications where timing allows.

#### **4.7 Competition**

This key result area aims to *maintain a competitive program that meets the needs of players at all levels*. It encompasses all of the duplicate sessions the Club has to offer.

The following initiatives have been identified

##### **4.7.1 Revitalise Evening Sessions**

Attendance for the Monday and Thursday evening sessions has dropped off significantly over recent years.

Viable evening sessions are important for NBC as they facilitate participation by lower age profile players, those still working and students. These player categories are key growth areas. Strategies are required to make those sessions attractive to members.

##### **4.7.2 Session Times**

Consider whether the weekly schedule of sessions and the starting times are appropriate.

##### **4.7.3 Competition Prizes**

Prize carrying events are scheduled for each session taking into account the amount of member participation at those sessions.

This practice should be reviewed:-

- Is major event prize money adequate
- Is prize money overall adequate
- Is prize money correctly targeted

NBC also comes up with a handicap winner for each pair's session. Should this pair receive greater recognition (small weekly prize)

##### **4.7.4 Graded Sessions**

NBC does not have a session specifically structured for newer players. Introducing a graded session for either Tuesday/Wednesday should be considered as this may encourage attendance by newer players.

##### **4.7.5 Session Management**

Continually recruit suitable persons for the roles of directors and scorers.

#### **4.8 Financial Performance**

NBC targets to run at a surplus each year that is likely to be adequate to meet its longer term financial obligations for renewal of assets.

##### **4.8.1 Forward Planning for Revenue**

Cost increases need to be monitored and planned for in advance to ensure key revenues, table fees and member registrations, are set appropriately.

##### **4.8.2 Strategic Planning**

Maintain in issue and currency, the schedule of asset replacements to ensure funds are accumulated as necessary

#### **4.9 Administration**

NBC operates through a central committee, supported by sub committees and a large number of volunteers. Its executive is also supported by a part-time secretary. Those arrangements have been unchanged for many years, over which time the club's activities have increased substantially. Consideration is required whether those arrangements are optimum for the Club now, specifically:-

##### **4.9.1 Administration Requirements**

What areas of the Club's activities may be better achieved using professional services?

- Session management is not feasible as that is all they would be able to do. There would be no direct financial return.
- The "newer areas" of promotion may fit, with success being measured in member growth.
- Some aspects of current administration could fit - member data base, member registration renewals, board dealing perhaps.

##### **4.9.2 Feasibility of Professional Administration**

NBC should evaluate the cost of such an arrangement and how it could be funded.

- Member growth
- Increased table fees
- From current annual surplus

##### **4.9.3 Replacement & Training of Volunteers**

Many necessary functions are currently looked after by volunteers. Those people need to be given the support they require to carry out those roles.

- Maintain register of volunteers
- Involve those people in decisions relative to their roles
- Train as necessary new people, and where changes occur
- Identify skills available from our membership to supplement the volunteer group

## **5.0 OUR FUTURE PLANS**

This page deliberately left blank. Strategies for the current year are appended hereunder.

### Strategic Plan Section 5 - Initiatives planned to commence over 2013-14

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	RESPONSIBILITY	WHEN	COST EST	STAGES
<b>PREMISES:</b>					
<b>Provide and maintain an attractive clubhouse with modern facilities</b>	Arrange review of electrical systems by an electrician – upgrade as necessary	B Webster	Oct-13	Nil	Completed
	Upgrade main hall lights	B Webster	Dec-13	\$1,900	Quotation accepted
	Appoint group to look at feasibility of enhancement of the present property, or to relocate to new premises	Action deferred on this item			
	Replacement of front fence	B Webster	Jun-14	\$2,500	Evaluate fence types available and recommend to Committee - Mar 2014 Work completed Jun 2014
<b>SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT:</b>					
<b>Foster and promote enjoyment of, and participation in, bridge</b>	Introduce initiatives to improve table etiquette	Committee	Mar-14	Nil	Include as discussion point for Directors meeting planned for early 2014
<b>RECRUITMENT &amp; MARKETING:</b>					
<b>Increase the number of active members playing bridge</b>	Outline an on-going marketing strategy	A Morris	Mar-14	TBA	Presentation to Committee
	Review current website content and presentation	R Bell	Jun-14	\$5,000	Sub-committee formed Scoring system recommendation - Dec 2013 Website recommendation - Mar 2014 Project Completed - Jun 2014
	Appoint Press Officer for articles in local newspapers	A Morris	Dec-13	Nil	Approach appropriate members
	Develop strategy to attract a group of younger age players	Action deferred on this item			

<b>IMPROVEMENT PATHWAYS:</b>					
<b>Improve the bridge-playing skills of members</b>	Arrange conduct of at least one playing skills improvement course	Committee	Dec-13	Nil	Paul McGrath sessions - Oct 2013
			Jun-14	Nil	Seek opportunity for additional activity
	Plan for the transition of learners to regular players via mentoring, supervised play, or other strategies	A Stiller	Mar-14	Nil	Report to Committee on current activities
<b>COMMUNICATION:</b>					
<b>Develop effective communication throughout the Club</b>	Facilitate consistency in pre-session announcements	T Wagstaff	Mar-14	Nil	Establish communication path for this
<b>COMPETITIONS:</b>					
<b>Provide an annual balanced program of bridge sessions</b>	Key person appointed to oversee annual program, monitoring coming events to ensure they are properly promoted and planned	Committee	Dec-13	Nil	Pam Robinson - daytime sessions, Janet Hill Monday nights, Tony Wagstaff Thursday nights
	Encourage members to participate in Hunter Interclub Teams – particularly those eligible for B & C grades	T Wagstaff	Mar-14	Nil	Request early advice of sessions with appropriate detail
<b>FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE:</b>					
<b>Manage a financial program with a high degree of professionalism</b>	Asset replacement funding schedule brought up to date	T Wagstaff	Dec-13	Nil	Report to committee on present standing
<b>ADMINISTRATION:</b>					
<b>Ensure effective management of administrative activities</b>	Prepare summary of tasks performed by volunteers and consider alternative methods	R Broughton	Jun-14	Nil	Presentation to Committee
	Electronic filing of old records	G Rummey	Mar-14	TBA	Feasibility report to Committee