



CANBERRA BRIDGE CLUB INC. STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027

August 2024

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1 Executive Summary

In 2024 the Canberra Bridge Club (CBC) Committee reviewed and updated the Club's Strategic Plan that was drafted in 2012. In the 12 years since this plan was drafted, the Committee recognised that there have been significant changes to many aspects that affect the Club and that the Strategic Plan needed to be brought in line with new demands placed on the Club.

The updated 2024 Strategic Plan builds on the 2012 draft plan. It reflects changes that the Club has experienced since 2012 and action that the Committee considers necessary. These changes relate to membership (demographics, composition and numbers), technological changes and advances affecting the Club, the importance of social amenity afforded by the Club to members (especially in the aftermath of COVID 19), updated governance and administration to reflect changes in ACT legislative requirements for associations, and the importance of communication and marketing for the Club.

The 2024 Strategic Plan outlines five broad areas of focus for future improvement and development which align with the CBC's objects and mission, namely:

- Premises and environment.
- Governance, administration and culture.
- Program.
- Member satisfaction.
- Marketing and communication.

The plan outlines how the Club can meet the demands placed on it, in particular:

- Recognising the changing demographics of its membership and the need for dynamic initiatives to maintain and increase its membership across all age groups,
- Taking advantage of technological changes and implementing effective use of technology to enhance members' capacity for technological learning and skills acquisition,
- Maintaining an active learning and skills improvement program for members,
- Providing an enjoyable and socially engaging environment for members, and
- Maintaining the building to a satisfactory standard that reflects suggestions from members and the Club House Committee.

The Committee commends the 2024 Strategic Plan to the membership and welcomes any comments members may have on it. It is the Committee's intention to regularly review the Plan to ensure that it is reflective of changes and developments that impact the Club.

2 Introduction

The Canberra Bridge Club (CBC) is an incorporated Association that was incorporated in the ACT on 29 March 1972.

The CBC it is a member of the Bridge Federation of the ACT (BFACT) and the Australian Bridge Federation (ABF) and operates under the ABF's guidelines.

The CBC aims to provide a friendly and competitive environment for all players, ranging from beginners to international representatives.

In October 2023, the CBC Committee recognised the need to review the 2012 draft strategic plan and update the guide the ongoing development of the Association.

3 Our Members

In June 2024, the Canberra Bridge Club has over 780 members who have progressed beyond beginner status. Of these 758 are fee paying members.

Bridge players may be grouped into four groups:

- **Day time social players** - members who attend the regular duplicate sessions. These include the daytime games and the non-championship evening sessions.

The clubroom environment and facilities are very high priorities for this group. Other priorities include the opportunities for players to improve for example intermediate lessons. Access to daytime red Masterpoints events is also important.

- **Highly skilled/competitive players** - players who regularly compete at National events, and/or have represented Australia in international tournaments.

Generally, these members attend the competition night with the aim of competing in a challenging and high-quality event. Players with improving skills want a competitive environment including multi-week events and recognition of achievements.

- **Beginners and advancers.**

Attracting and retaining new members is vital for the club's continuing success. - Introducing new people to the game is an important way to increase the club's playing population. It has been recognised that the number of beginner courses held per year (and therefore the wait time for prospective members) is an important issue for this group. Other factors which are important to this group include:

- access to partner.
- A program to help players improve, including lessons, structured play, and mentoring.
- A friendly and welcoming environment for all stages of their development.

- **Youth Players**

Although youth players generally start as beginners, the group has unique characteristics. This group often plays elsewhere, either at university or in a separate social environment - either online or face to face. Younger players frequently improve rapidly and tend to seek out the competitive aspects of the game rather than the social ones. Youth players share the characteristics of the previous two groups. 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.

3.1 Member Analysis

As may be noted in Figure 1, in a sample of 579 members who played bridge in 2023 the majority of members aged over 55 years. The average age of the sample is 72.3 years and the range 15 to 96 years. Fifty-five per cent of members are female.

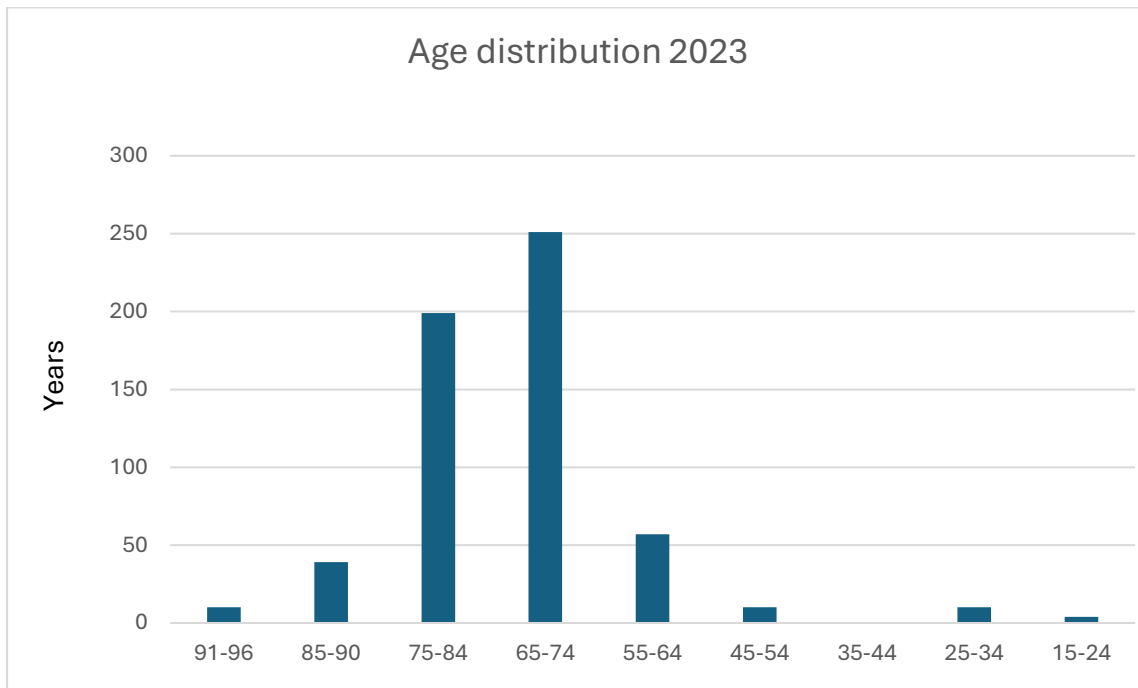


Figure 1

As may be noted in Figure 2, the largest group of CBC members live in the inner south area of Canberra with the smallest group of members residing in Gungahlin.

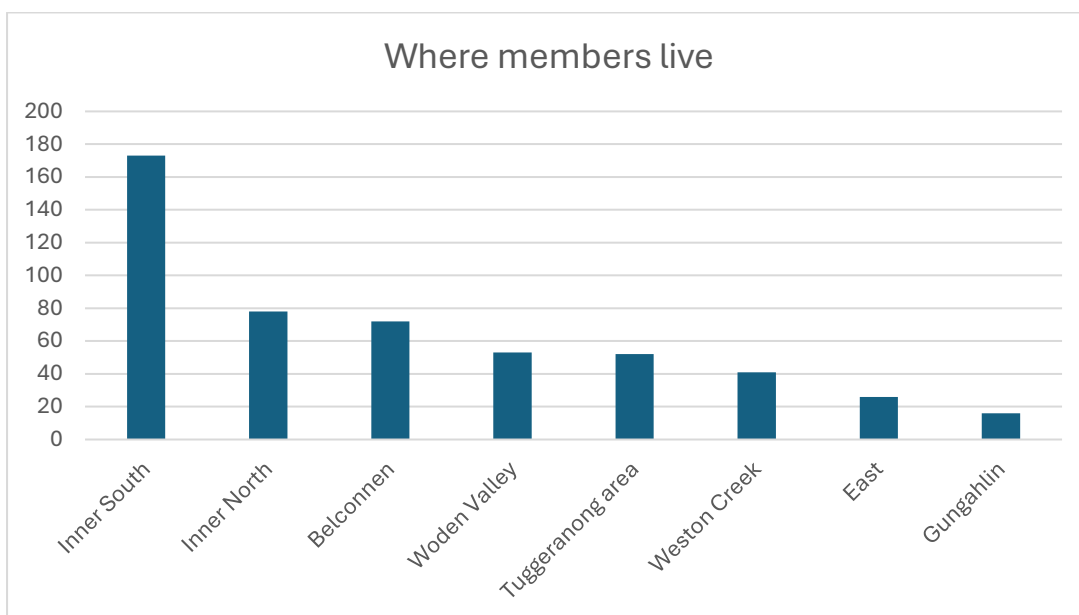


Figure 2

If an assumption is made that there are no socio-economic barriers to becoming a bridge player and membership of the CBC, it appears that there is potential to increase membership across the ACT. Figure 3 describes the membership to population ratio across the ACT using the inner south membership as a standard.

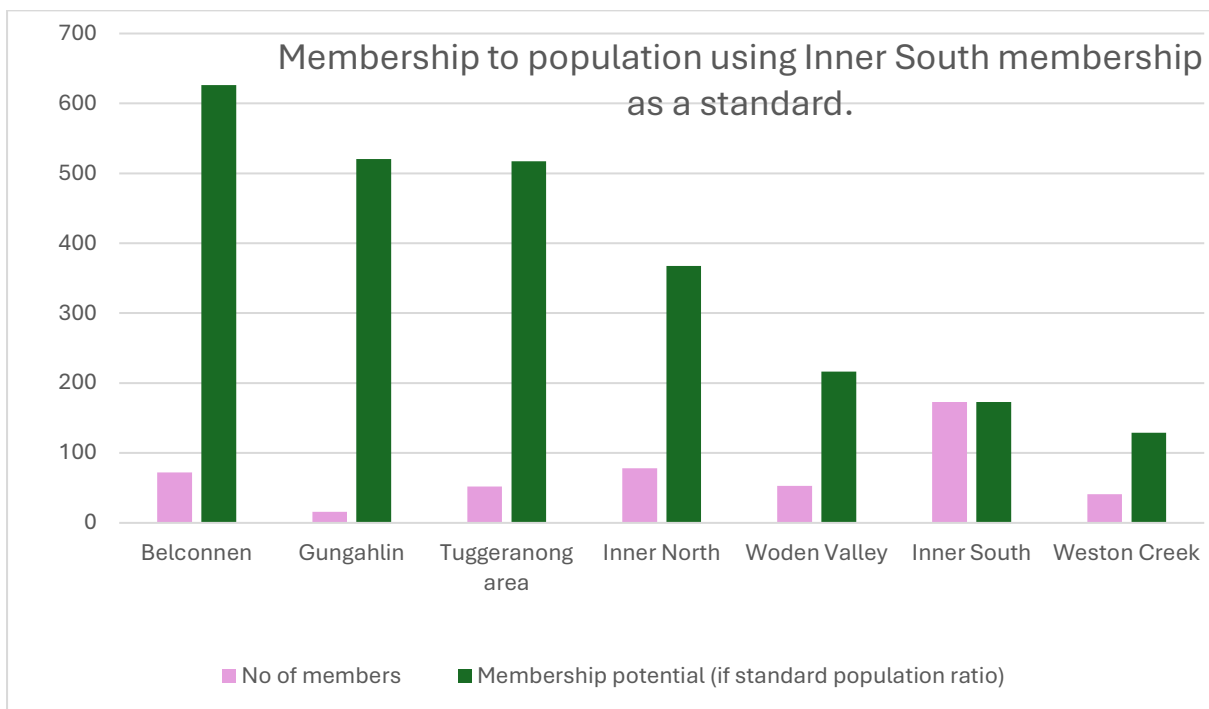


Figure 3 Standardised membership distribution by location

As may be noted in Figure 4 the total annual number of sessions played between 2019-2023 displays the impact of the COVID shut down in 2020 and the influx of former Grand Slam members.

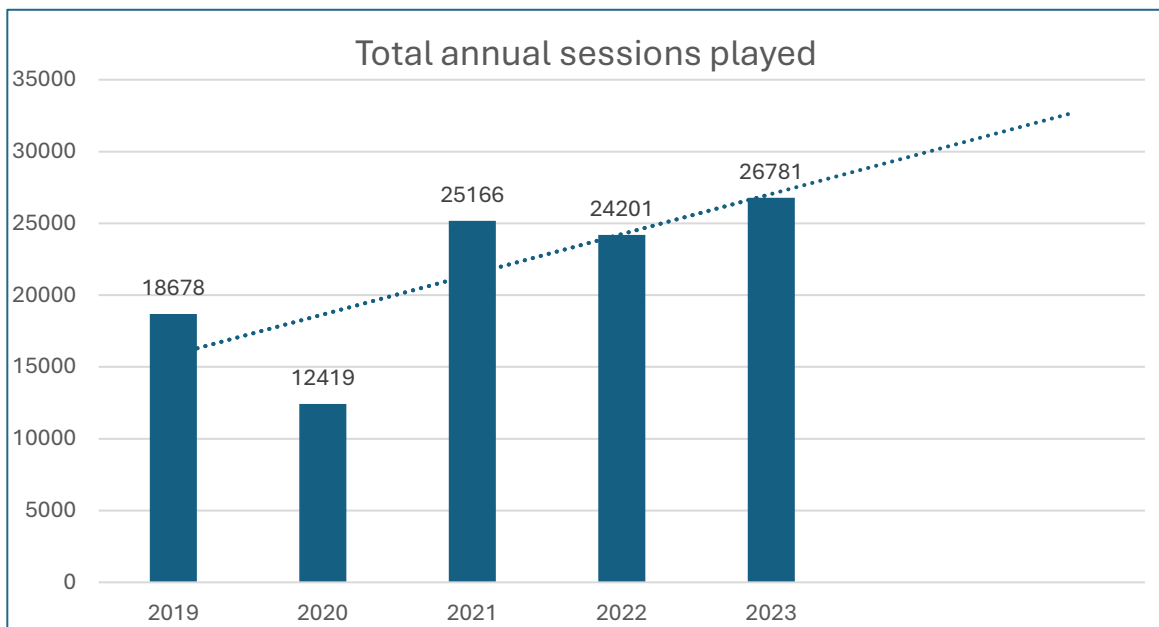


Figure 4 Total annual sessions played.

As may be noted in Figure 5, the average number of members who play bridge each month is 506. The median number of games played per member per month is 4 games and the range of number of games played is 1-19 games/month.



Figure 5

As may be noted in Figure 6, Club and Graduate level members tend to play fewer games than members with higher Master points rankings.

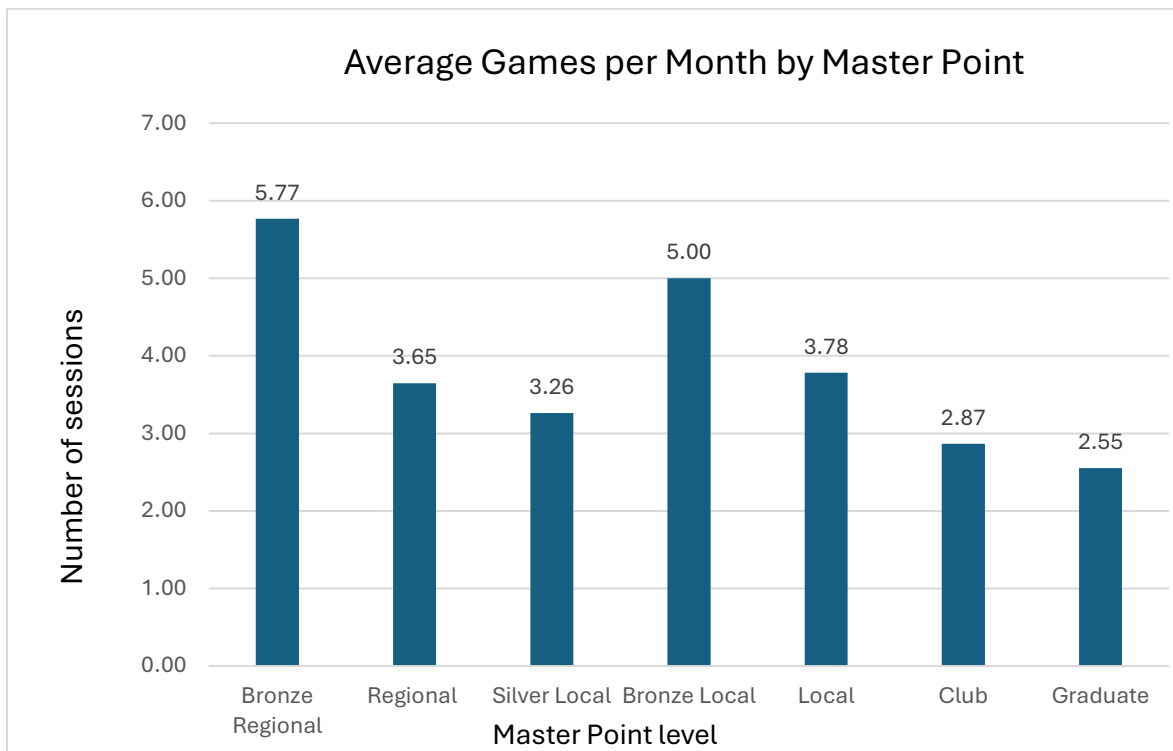


Figure 6

As may be noted in Figure 7 the number of new members who joined in any calendar year has increased above the 2018 level. Following the COVID shutdown a large number of former Grand Slam members joined CBC contributing to the 156 new members who joined the CBC in 2020-21.



Figure 7

An analysis of membership retention data shows that membership retention seems to stabilise after a player has been a member for three years.

4 Environmental Scan

Several factors with the potential to impact on the operations and future of the CBC have been identified.

4.1 Political

The average age of CBC members is heavily skewed towards retirement age. As such, many members may rely on forms of income which may be subject to changes in government policy such as taxation or superannuation income or changes to policies which have the potential to affect older Australians for example residential aged care.

Government policy has the potential to affect some CBC members' disposable income which in turn may affect willingness to pay and the number of sessions played.

4.2 ECONOMIC

Some older Australians, particularly those who have not been affected by increases in mortgage interest rates and have a non-government pension retirement income source, have increased their discretionary spending in 2023.

However, the impact of higher interest rates on housing loans and the impact of inflation on cost of living have the potential to affect CBC members disposable income and therefore willingness to pay for membership and bridge sessions.

4.3 SOCIAL

Australia's demography is changing. Recent changes include:

- An ageing, population with more people living alone and a high percentage of baby boomers approaching retirement age placing economic strains on health and ageing services and facilities and social welfare payments and services.
- The emergence of GenY, a sector of young people with different expectations with respect to employment, leisure, purchasing behaviour and use of technology.
- More consumers shopping on-line. This has implications for CBC administrative systems.
- The Australian Capital Territory is projected to be the fastest growing jurisdiction by 2025–26 at 1.9 per cent, partially driven by relatively higher rates of births and lower rates of deaths compared to most other states, due to its younger age profile¹.
- Higher levels of immigration to both increase the population and address skill shortages resulting in multicultural, diversified communities. From 2024-25 the ACT is expected to overtake Victoria as the fastest growing jurisdiction driven by overseas net migration and high contribution from natural increases which reflects younger aged structure.
- In the 2021 Census, those born in England, India, China and New Zealand were the largest groups of overseas born at the national level with those born in India being the largest overseas born group living the ACT (3.9%).

¹ Population Statement 2023. <https://population.gov.au>

Researchers² highlight two groups which are important to the CBC.

- Adults 21 -around age 59 years who are independent and work to the average age of retirement.
- Adults - aged 60 to around 80 years who are independent – an extended period of relatively active life before commencing care services.

Because it is time-consuming, bridge is often taken up by people in their retirement years. It appears that although young people and people approaching retirement age are important to increasing/maintaining CBC membership, the club should not underestimate the potential for inclusion and participation of older adults in club activities.

4.4 TECHNOLOGICAL

Technology has enabled a shift towards a cashless society in Australia. The COVID Pandemic appears (and the associated need to not handle money as an infection control strategy) appears to have fuelled the pace of change.

The government's planned regulation of the system, contained in proposed amendments to the Reforms to the Payment Systems (Regulation) Act 1998, is purported to be a step towards establishing a secure and trustworthy cashless society in Australia.

The CBC introduced technological changes in key areas such as online bridge and payment systems and the CBCs website has been updated.

The CBC will need to ensure that the technology used to support the cashless system is fit for purpose and complies with relevant standards

Computer programs and online platforms provide opportunities for practice, analysis, and collaboration. Bridge-playing software can simulate hands, offer feedback, and provide valuable learning resources. Additionally, online platforms facilitate playing with partners and opponents from around the world, increasing access to competitive play and exposure to diverse playing styles.

The implications for the CBC from these developments include:

- A percentage of players moving to online play to access more competitive play
- Changes to directing and teaching approaches may be required

It is anticipated that technology will be a component of the way the game of bridge evolves into the future.

There is potential to use smart devices and social media in communication and marketing activities
The is also potential to develop:

- the electronic newsletters system to improve communication; and
- multi-modal delivery for example podcasts and other IT enabled communication/delivery media such as and webinars and videos to assist/support teaching, mentoring and member communication activities.

Greater use of technology appears warranted to support member skill development and improve member communication. However further research and monitoring of developments is required.

² Ageing and social change in Australia Cathy Gong and Hal Kendig

4.5 LEGAL

The CBC is an incorporated Association and operates under the Associations Incorporation Act 1991. Updated Association Incorporation Regulations came into effect on 1 February 2024.

Currently a process is being undertaken to update the Club's Constitution and associated governing documents.

4.6 ENVIRONMENTAL

Global warming and associated climate change affects the frequency, intensity, spread, duration, and timing of weather and climate extremes. Climate change affects health including mental health. More people have died in Australia from heatwaves than all other natural disasters combined.

Canberra has cold winters and hot summers. More extreme temperatures and weather events have the potential to change the way members play bridge for example, a shift towards more online bridge played in the comfort of members' own homes.

A October 2023 member survey about CBC premises highlighted member support for improvement in the heating, cooling and air circulation system. Solutions offered included an upgrade of the air-conditioning system, insulation, double glazing and a change in window treatments. This area is regarded as a priority for CBC building redevelopment.

Temperature controlled club rooms with access to rehydration appears imperative to maintain the number of members attending CBC face to face bridge sessions.

4.7 CANBERRA AND OTHER ACT BRIDGE CLUBS (COMPETITORS)

An analysis of bridge playing venues in the Canberra area found there are at least nine venues which offer face-to-face bridge sessions to Canberrans. In addition to the CBCs online offer, there are several online platforms that may be accessed by CBC members.

The fees charged for face-to-face sessions range from \$4 to \$7.

4.8 SWOT ANALYSIS

4.8.1 Strengths

The CBCs strengths include:

- a well-located purpose-built premises with easy access parking.
- highly skilled players, directors, teachers and administrators available to support members.
- a large membership base with skills in both bridge playing and to assist with the effective running of the club.
- a comprehensive teaching programs across all levels.

4.8.2 Weaknesses

The CBCs weaknesses include:

- uneven age profile.
- an ageing building now requiring high-cost maintenance. The building has poor access for people with disabilities.
- lack of marketing – generally and to specific groups.
- lack of rigour in governance processes.

- rate of retention after beginners' lessons and supervised play (appears low).
- lack of role definition between committee members and staff and CBC and BFACT.
- low use of information technology to streamline the administration of the CBC.
- heavy reliance on managers in the matching of bridge partners.
- although teaching and mentoring is a strength, a more structured approach for mentors regarding their role, for example guidelines appears to be required.

Many issues have been recognised such as the need to maintain a friendly and welcoming culture and the CBC's ambience are in the process of being addressed.

4.8.3 Opportunities

An analysis of opportunities identified a number of potential opportunities. These include:

- new members from a variety of sectors.
- additional support for new and current members including improved communication and exploring the potential for additional venues for face-to-face sessions.
- increase the quality of services to everyone at the club.

Some issues have been recognised and are in the process of being addressed.

4.8.4 Threats

The game of bridge is facing a number of challenges due to other pastimes and other avenues for bridge players. The proliferation of online games and activities, especially for youth, means that there is a high level of competing interest.

CBC is the main source of face-to-face bridge teaching programs, but online learning and less expensive sessions are threats to member retention.

Other clubs with lower overheads, either through subsidies or cheaper premises or with a welcoming environment, may take away existing and potential members. That is, perceived problems with CBC culture are also a threat to membership growth.

The proliferation of online games and activities, especially for youth, means that there are far more competing interests these days.

The CBC needs to investigate how to address these threats and whether they can be turned into opportunities.

5 Mission

5.1 CBC Objects

As outlined in the Constitution, the objects of the CBC and its members are:

- (a) to promote the game of Contract Bridge;
- (b) to promote the interests of the members of the club;
- (c) to provide facilities for the playing of Contract Bridge
- (d) to organise, foster, and promote club championships, and other bridge tournaments and competitions;
- (e) to organise, foster, promote and participate in bridge tournaments and competitions with or against other bridge clubs;
- (f) to provide tuition in the playing of Contract Bridge;
- (g) to arrange social and sporting functions and gathering of members and, where appropriate, visitors;
- (h) to affiliate with, and to maintain affiliation with, the Federation;
- (i) to represent on the Federation the interests of members;
- (j) to cooperate with and assist other persons and clubs having identical or similar objects in matters of common interest; and
- (k) to do all such things, including the raising of funds, as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of all or any of the above objects.

The 2024 mission has been designed to incorporate these components as well as include the CBCs role in promoting the game of bridge.

“We are a friendly, diverse, inclusive and well managed bridge community. We aim to foster the uptake of bridge and provide a place where bridge may be enjoyed, and its benefits gained for members of all levels of ability and skill.”

The strategies the CBC use to develop and improve CBC facilities and services need to align with the mission and objects.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have been developed to support the Canberra Bridge Club objects and mission. Therefore, the broad focus for club activities should be to:

- Foster the development of Bridge playing skills in diverse groups across the ACT community.
- Develop and maintain an inclusive, accessible and friendly Bridge club and community.
- Encourage and support players new to bridge.
- Provide a range of opportunities for participation in Bridge playing at all skills levels.
- Work to ensure the overall success and sustainability of the club.

As outlined in Section 6, five key result areas which align with the objects, mission and objectives have been developed.

6 Key Result Areas

There are five broad categories (or key result areas) in which opportunities for improvement and development have been identified.

6.1 Premises and Environment

In 2022-23 the CBC improved the car park and garden (\$9,400). The audited accounts note 7 states:

“The building is now getting quite old so maintenance expenditure will be increasing.”

The 2004 draft strategic plan noted:

- *“The club needs to ensure that facilities are disability friendly to cater for our membership, and to make it visually attractive to new members”*
- The need to replace gutters, upgrade the building entrance area, improve kitchen facilities and upgrade office hardware.

The October 2023 member survey also highlight the need to upgrade the facilities and décor to improve the enjoyment and comfort of members.

It is understood that many CBC member play on average once a week at the Deakin with many playing additional games at alternative (local to home) venues.

It is important that all venues are friendly, welcoming and supportive.

Therefore, the CBC needs to:

1. Maintain and develop the interior and exterior of the Deakin premises.
2. Develop the facilities to improve member comfort and ambiance for socialisation.
3. Improve facilities for people with disabilities.
4. Examine the potential to extend the range of venues from one central location to decentralised locations.
5. Ensure the club atmosphere is supportive and friendly.

6.2 Governance, Administration and Culture

In 2023, the CBC committee acknowledged there was a need to:

- Improve the governance and administration of the Association.
- Implement strategies to improve the Associations culture to align with the Association’s objects.

In 2023, the process to improve the payment system (and increase efficiency) was commenced. The core development of MyABF has been completed. (the system includes congresses, club administration, online payments, masterpoints and scoring).

The CBC relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers to administer the organisation and maintain the premises. The departure of a long-term manager has highlighted that the efficient administration of the CBC is vested in individuals and not effective and efficient systems and processes.

Therefore, the CBC needs to:

1. Develop efficient and effective governance to administer the club for the benefit of members.
2. Further develop policies and systems that ensure the highest ethical behaviour in all forms of bridge and to ensure there is a supportive environment for members.
3. Examine staffing level and infrastructure needed to support members. Consider staff to volunteer ratio to best serve the organisation.
4. Investigate and implement appropriate use of technology to support CBC operations.
5. Develop strategies to ensure membership and governance profile reflects the multicultural profile of the Canberra community.
6. Ensure cost to members is considered cost effective/value for money.
7. Continue to develop a friendly supportive culture. This includes:
 - a. Further develop the complaints process and ensure complaints are dealt with fairly.
 - b. Be known as a listening organisation. Seek out player feedback and act on it.
 - c. Champion and support matters of social responsibility.

6.3 Program

The CBC bridge playing and teaching programs are highly regarded. However, in the processes of consultation undertaken to develop the strategic plan several issues were raised and provide an opportunity for further growth and improvement.

In particular, members want a mix of sessions to suit various skill levels. There is a perception that the CBC favours top players who are not friendly/supportive of social bridge players.

The analysis of where and how often member play bridge at the Deakin premises indicates there is a need to explore approaches to offer sessions other than at Deakin.

It is understood that the Association would need more Directors to be able to offer such a program. As noted, the relationship between the CBC and BFACT requires definition and further work to increase efficiency and effectiveness. In particular BFACT has a role in the development of Directors across the ACT and regional programs.

Although the teaching program is a strength it has been noted that the number of beginner teaching programs offered each year could be increased. Until recently there was not a mechanism to ensure new teachers met the CBC standard for teaching. The “teach the teacher” program is a good start to ensure the teaching program continues to be a CBC strength. Peer review sessions have also been implemented in 2023-4 and will continue.

The visiting teachers and intermediate teaching programs are also highly regarded.

Therefore, the CBC needs to:

1. Sessions

- Develop the program for the majority of members (mindful of player feedback). That is, don't develop a program for the highly skilled players. This may require alternate approaches to meet the needs of highly skilled players.

- In collaboration with BFACT:
 - Work towards offering decentralised sessions.
 - Develop the session program to develop competition experience for all players in the club.
 - Ensure our ABF-licensed Gold Point events are excellent to attend and play.
 - Develop online sessions and support for online play.
 - Develop strategies to increase the average number of sessions played.
- 2. Skills development**
- Accelerate the teacher development program.
 - Consider expansion of the beginner’s teaching program.
 - Develop supportive skill development pathways to assist our members improve throughout their bridge career.
 - Continue to extend our training programs for beginners, intermediates and advanced players.
 - Develop strategies to improve the retention rate of new players (includes standardising measurement of retention rate).
- 3. Directors**
- In collaboration with BFACT, support and develop the next generation of Directors at Club, Congress and National Level
 - Develop processes to quality assure how sessions are directed.

6.4 Member Satisfaction

The average age of a CBC members is 72.3 years (range 15 to 96). There is a need to continually recruit new members. The percentage of beginners who join the CBC appears to be measured at the time of attended at supervised sessions. Data indicates approximately 36-52% of beginners join the CBC. The Novice Program surveys beginners and these data together with beginner/new member retention rates needs to be collected and analysed.

A recent development is the appearance of bridge sessions held at aged care facilities. Canberra is also the fastest growing jurisdiction driven by overseas net migration so there is an opportunity to explore the migrant support network about the possibility of using bridge as a means to integrate into the Canberra community.

Pre-retiree are an important source of new members and there is an opportunity to market to this demographic and develop lessons and sessions to suit this potential membership group.

The median number of sessions played by members each month is 4. A program which encourages members to increase the number of sessions played per month would be beneficial to players and the CBC.

Therefore, the CBC needs to:

1. Further develop bridge offerings and incentives that encourage members to increase the number of sessions they play, increase their level of satisfaction with the Canberra Bridge Club and increase the member retention rate.
2. Conduct further research regarding the reasons players don’t continue playing bridge following introductory courses.

3. Explore strategies to support older members play more often (for example online or face-to-face sessions held at a location close to where they live).
4. Increase the opportunities for social interaction.

6.5 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Currently, CBC marketing efforts are not a strength. There is opportunity to revitalise the marketing and sponsorship program. There is also opportunity to improve member communication.

As members appear to be price sensitive, it's important the CBC offers value for money. There is opportunity to develop a member benefits package.

Therefore, the CBC needs to:

1. Further develop bridge offerings and incentives that attract new members to join and former players to return. This includes exploring the potential to attract new members from multicultural communities, aged care facilities, pre-retirees and young people.
2. Develop marketing strategies including ways to attract new members and increase the public profile of bridge.
3. Further develop member communication including electronic newsletter, website and social media.
4. Develop a member benefits package designed to attract and retain members and to encourage skill development.