

Host System – Partnership Service

A well-run host system is a major asset to any bridge club. It helps boost club membership and contributes to a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. If a player is without a partner, perhaps because the regular partner is ill or suddenly called away, it is wonderful to be able simply to turn up at the local club in the certain knowledge that a partner will be available.

It is also particularly helpful for bridge players new to the area, as they can play with a different host or other partnerless individual each week until they find someone they can settle down into a regular partnership with. One club reports having up to nine individuals coming along without partners. This raises their numbers by two whole tables.

If a club can afford to, it may wish to consider paying someone to act as non-playing Tournament Director to run its sessions. In that case the TD can also act as a host and make up a partnership if needed.

The following recommendations are based on the experiences of a bridge club, where the members' rota host system works very well, and a number of people regularly come along without partners.

- It is important to have an enthusiastic and committed member organising the host system. Another club member should be ready to deputise when the organiser is away.
- The organiser draws up a 6-monthly rota of members to act as host each night that the club meets. This is basically in alphabetical order, but people who regularly play with each other (e.g. married couples) should not be expected to host on consecutive weeks. Each member is expected to take his or her turn. In a club with about 50 members, meeting once a week, for each member to host once a year should be no hardship. The rota should be posted on the club noticeboard and website and brought to the attention of all members.
- However, when introducing a new host system to a club, members should be given the opportunity to speak in confidence with the organiser if they have a good reason to opt out.

- If any member cannot host on the allocated date, that member should arrange a swap with someone else, inform the organiser and annotate the list on the club noticeboard accordingly. Only if unable to find a swap, should the organiser be asked to arrange a substitute.
- The organiser should be prepared to substitute for someone who has to drop out at the last minute. For this reason, the organiser would not normally feature on the rota itself. If the club has a members' email mailing list, that can also be used to ask for volunteers to fill a gap.
- The host is expected to arrive in good time and take up a prominent position, perhaps by the club noticeboard, and look out for anyone arriving without a partner. It is the host's duty to pair off such people, if possible matching up players of approximately equal standard. The host should be the last person to pair off. If there is no-one left to pair off with, it is the host who goes home without a game that evening.
- As recompense, the host is either let off the table money for that evening if she or he ends up playing; or if the host has to go home without a game, is given a voucher which can be exchanged for a free game at a later date. If the club can afford to, it may consider giving the host two free games.
- The host's regular partner should either try to arrange a different partner for that evening, or may come along and wait until just before play begins, at which point he or she will get a game either with the last remaining unpaired player or with the host.
- The organiser should contact hosts two or three weeks before they are due to take a turn, check that they are still available, and give them a copy of the club's guidelines for hosts.

It is obviously better if every session has a host, but a club playing several times a week may wish to have just one or two designated duplicates a week with a host, at least to begin with.

Larger busier clubs may wish to provide the host with a badge for identification.

To avoid abuse of the system, some clubs restrict the number of times an individual can use the host system in a given period.

There can be a problem with some, often elderly players who rely on another member for transport to and from the club and who would be in difficulty if they had to go home whilst their driver stayed on. If there are many members sharing transport, a host system may be less feasible.

Partnership service

A host system is by far the most effective in terms of helping to attract and integrate new members. However, if it is not possible to arrange one, then the club might consider offering a partnership service. The simplest way is to have a nominated member who acts as a telephone or email contact for anyone looking for a partner for a particular club session.

A club website could also be used for this purpose. If the club keeps a member list on its website, this can be set up so that anyone looking for a partner on a particular date can flag this on the website. Please note, however, that any such list should be password protected and only accessible to club members. The club should also obtain permission from each member before including his or her contact details in this list.

If the club has an electronic [mailing list](#), members looking for partners can also post their requests to that.