

Promotional Memberships Report (July 2025)

The Bylaws mandate an annual report on promotional memberships before the Delegates reauthorize them for another year. This is the report for the 2025 Delegates Meeting.

The US Chess Membership System changed from the in-house developed membership system we had used since 2005 to CIVI-CRM, beginning July 7, 2020. The nature of the systems' differences will result in this report offering a different look at the data for the year ending 5/31/2021 and beyond. Additionally, starting in 2025, the Fiscal Year (FY) changed from being May 31st to June 30th. That is leading to a slight elevation in most numbers in this report, as they encompass 13 months, from 6/1/24 through 6/30/25.

In early 2020 US Chess was on the cusp of having 95,000 members, a new all-time membership record, then the COVID pandemic hit. Membership dropped from 94,948 at the end of February to 81,337 by the end of May and continued to drop for another year. Membership bottomed out at 51,777 in April of 2021, then began an unprecedented 31 month climb to an all-time high of 117,716 in February of 2024.

The usual seasonal pattern, reaching a high in February/March (during the height of scholastic chess activity) and a low in July/August seems to be consistent, with membership totals at 111,898 for the end of the 2024-25 fiscal year. While slightly down from 113,442 at fiscal year end 23-24 (1.4% decrease year over year), this does not yet appear to be a definitive trend, but likely a part of the cyclical nature of our membership curve, now being read at a lower point in our calendar year. [Our end of May 2025 total membership numbers, for straight comparison, were 112,582.]

Detailed membership information is available online in graphical & numerical forms at <https://www.uschess.org/datapage/uscf0200.htm> & [uschess.org/datapage/USCFMEMB0200.htm](https://www.uschess.org/datapage/USCFMEMB0200.htm). We are transitioning from using the Gambit membership numbers as our official membership counts to reporting directly from our Membership Database. I am confident in the accuracy of our new reporting system, and I am planning to have a comparable page where those numbers will be available to replace the links above for numbers going forward soon.

Membership in US Chess

The two major types of promotional memberships currently in effect are the group membership program (voucher) and the two-month trial membership. This report also covers programs under which the US Chess membership requirement is waived for rated tournaments (Foreign GMs/IMs, JTPs).

Group (Voucher) Memberships:

The group membership program is a voucher system. Affiliates purchase a block of memberships at a discounted rate (the rate varies depending upon the number of vouchers purchased) and are sent vouchers for those memberships which can be redeemed online. The youth group membership pricing plans start with as few as 25 memberships in the initial block [at price breaks of \$18/\$15/\$12; rates increased to these as of September 1, 2024]. For more on the voucher program visit <https://new.uschess.org/civicrm/contribute/transact?cid=0&reset=1&id=6>, or access it through the TD/Affiliate dashboard on your US Chess member profile.

Although the voucher system was designed so that the voucher could be redeemed by a parent, coach or TD, most are redeemed by the organization which purchased the block of vouchers. Many organizations fail to supply US Chess with the member's correct birthdate or mailing address, a contributor to duplicate membership IDs. This practice leads to data quality issues in the database and increases frustration among players who are trying to access their accounts.

In recent years, vouchers were changed so that they are now valid for nine months rather than for six months (plus the fractional portion of the month in which they are issued) and once redeemed are good for a one-year Group membership that does not include a printed magazine. This means that vouchers purchased at the start of the school year are essentially valid for the entire school year.

Usage of the group youth membership voucher program has rebounded after the pandemic, resulting in significantly more youth memberships being offered.

During the 2021-22 fiscal year, we issued 45 sets of vouchers to 35 different organizations, with many of vouchers being reissued due to pandemic expiration. With school programs shuttered during the pandemic and the loosening restrictions on voucher expiration dates, the program was quiet for most of the year.

During the 2022-23 fiscal year, we issued 90 sets of vouchers to 57 different organizations. In total, 4,432 vouchers were issued during the fiscal year.

During the 2023-24 fiscal year, we issued 227 sets of vouchers to 131 different organizations. In total, 19,643 vouchers were issued during the fiscal year. These values now exceed pre-pandemic levels.

During the 2024-25 fiscal year, we issued 198 sets of vouchers to 132 different organizations. In total, 19,780 vouchers were issued during the fiscal year. The price increase at the start of the 2024-25 academic year does not appear to have had a significant impact on program usage, indicating that they were likely expected and necessary by that point.

Two-month Trial Membership:

Below is a summary of the two-month trial memberships sold over the last several fiscal years, and the number of unique member IDs involved in those transactions. These number will vary from those reported in previous years due to a different and hopefully more accurate method of tracking trial membership activity.

During FY 2021-22 there were 267 memberships purchased on 250 different member IDs. 192 of these were subsequently Extended, and 92 were later Upgraded to a different membership category.

During FY 2022-23 there were 378 memberships purchased on 368 different member IDs. 134 of these were subsequently Extended, and 115 were later Upgraded to a different membership category.

During FY 2023-24 there were 190 memberships purchased on 184 different member IDs. 50 of these were subsequently Extended, and 44 were later Upgraded to a different membership category.

During FY 2024-25 there were 232 memberships purchased on 222 different member IDs. 41 of these were subsequently Extended, and 32 were later Upgraded to a different membership category.

International Online Membership:

In October of 2012, an International Online membership was authorized by the Executive Board. This membership is \$20 for one year, is only available to members living outside the USA, and members are expected to provide an email address. It is not available on the US Chess membership webstore but can be sold by US Chess affiliates at tournaments.

During FY 2021-22, 51 International Online Memberships were sold.

During FY 2022-23, 143 International Online Memberships were sold.

During FY 2023-24, 77 International Online Memberships were sold.

During FY 2024-25, 118 International Online Memberships were sold.

There is some question as to whether this program should continue. Originally, this was designed as a program to account for foreign adult players, who could not receive the print Chess Life magazine which was included with Adult membership at the time. Now that Regular Adult membership no longer defaults to having a print subscription, is this equitable that players who have a foreign address are able to receive a significant discount from regular membership?

No pilot membership programs were in effect for the fiscal year ending 6/30/2025.

Foreign Flagged GMs/IMs/WGMs/WIMs:

We also have the longstanding Delegate mandated waiver of membership requirements for foreign IMs and GMs. (GMs who are registered with FIDE as USA players are entitled to a free USCF membership by Delegate mandate, IMs are not. Additional information regarding these farther below.) Foreign players do not earn Grand Prix points unless they are also paid US Chess members. The table below uses our captured FIDE historical data to determine a FIDE registered player's title and country of registry as of the start of the event and does not take into consideration whether those foreign players are US Chess members. Online (ONL) and Over-the-Board (OTB) events are broken out separately.

| Fiscal Year | Type | gm | for_gm | for_gm_player | im | for_im | for_im_player |
|-------------|------|-----|--------|---------------|-----|--------|---------------|
| 2021-05-31 | ONL | 180 | 129 | 840 | 112 | 59 | 277 |
| 2022-05-31 | ONL | 81 | 62 | 267 | 71 | 47 | 162 |
| 2023-05-31 | ONL | 55 | 44 | 168 | 54 | 34 | 75 |
| 2024-05-31 | ONL | 41 | 35 | 85 | 28 | 19 | 3 |
| 2025-06-30 | ONL | 1 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 8 | 20 |

| Fiscal Year | Type | gm | for_gm | for_gm_player | im | for_im | for_im_player |
|-------------|------|-----|--------|---------------|-----|--------|---------------|
| 2021-05-31 | OTB | 46 | 23 | 58 | 56 | 23 | 95 |
| 2022-05-31 | OTB | 140 | 74 | 426 | 170 | 77 | 332 |
| 2023-05-31 | OTB | 188 | 113 | 621 | 229 | 125 | 650 |
| 2024-05-31 | OTB | 198 | 125 | 857 | 266 | 161 | 801 |
| 2025-06-30 | OTB | 227 | 149 | 968 | 254 | 137 | 660 |

USA Flagged GMs/WGMs:

There is also a long-standing Delegate mandate granting free memberships to USA-flag Grandmasters. [DACI 1980-37; formerly DACI 13] In the past the member was simply changed to life membership status, but in the last decade the member has been given a complementary regular adult membership with a duration of several years, so that if a player changes their FIDE registry to another country, they are no longer eligible for a free US Chess membership. Also, some players have purchased a life membership before earning the Grandmaster title. As a result, an exact historical count of USA flag Grandmasters receiving free memberships over time is not readily available, but we do have numbers from FY2425 onward. On the latest FIDE Ratings List there are 111 GMs and 14 WGMs with USA as their country of registry.

As of end of FY 2024-25, 99 GM Complimentary memberships are being provided [includes WGM]

Junior Tournament Player Program (JTP):

We also have the Junior Tournament Player program, which does not convey any ongoing membership privileges beyond participation in that event, but without any fee other than the ratings fee for that event.

There are two types of JTP events. Any affiliate may hold a Primary JTP event, one in which all players (including house players) are in the third grade or lower. A scholastic affiliate (the affiliate ID begins with the letter H) may also hold an in-school K-12 JTP event, one intended only for the students enrolled in that school and limited to students in the 12th grade or lower.

Adult players are not allowed in JTP events, not even as house players

Here's a breakdown on JTP events over the past several fiscal years, following the number of JTP events in the 2020-21 fiscal year, which were much lower due to the shutdown of most schools and their chess programs. The way data was collected may have changed the numbers a little from the previous report, and the membership system change may have modified some prior year counts.

| Primary (K-3) JTP events | | | | In School (K-12) JTP events | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Annual Data by fiscal year | | | | Annual Data by fiscal year | | | |
| Year End | jtp_primary | players | members | year | jtp_k12 | players | members |
| 2022-05-31 | 58 | 1297 | 1021 | 2022-05-31 | 89 | 1034 | 541 |
| 2023-05-31 | 75 | 2049 | 1373 | 2023-05-31 | 67 | 851 | 427 |
| 2024-05-31 | 75 | 1951 | 1319 | 2024-05-31 | 73 | 922 | 454 |
| 2025-06-30 | 106 | 2641 | 1528 | 2025-06-30 | 104 | 1277 | 698 |

Other Non-Membership Programs

State Games:

There is the longstanding waiver (dating back to 1989) of membership requirements for events that are part of sanctioned State Games (ie, sanctioned by the National Congress of State Games.) The national governing bodies for most other sports extended similar membership waivers to NCSG sanctioned events in the late 80's and early 90's, the exceptions being ones where national membership also includes participant insurance, such as gymnastics and boxing. At the present time, no states currently participate in this program.

House Players:

We have the 'House Player' rule, which the Delegates sanctioned in 1990. At present each section of an event may have one non-member house player per round, though a house player may not compete in over half of the rounds in that section without a waiver from the US Chess office, and an office override will be required if the house player scores better than 75% in the event. We do not have data which permits us to provide detailed statistics on house player usage.

TD Correction Fee:

Although not a membership program, TDs have the option to pay a \$10 correction fee if they discover after an event is over that a player was not a current member. This is not intended as a replacement for TD diligence in checking for current memberships and selling a membership to non-members in their events. TDs or affiliates who abuse this privilege may be subject to sanctions. Here are the number of \$10 fees processed in the last several fiscal years. Usage of this option appears to be on the increase, so additional checks for abuse may be needed.

The table below shows the number of \$10 fees processed, the number of unique member IDs associated with those fees and the number of affiliates with events that had \$10 fees in them.

| fiscal_year | count | members | affils |
|-------------|-------|---------|--------|
| ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- |
| 2020-05-31 | 345 | 309 | 133 |
| 2021-05-31 | 281 | 244 | 73 |
| 2022-05-31 | 415 | 384 | 149 |
| 2023-05-31 | 531 | 478 | 191 |
| 2024-05-31 | 755 | 672 | 252 |
| 2025-06-30 | 769 | 715 | 265 |