

## What are three challenges you see for the choral profession in Illinois and what ideas do you have about how IL-ACDA might rise to meet these challenges?

The music field has rapidly changed in the last 10 to 15 years. Here are three interconnected challenges that I see.

1. Many choral programs were facing declining enrollments prior to 2020, and the pandemic accelerated the issue. Now is a crucial time to rebuild programs, but directors are burned out.
2. Choral music in the US has historically consisted of culturally homogenous music rooted in the Western European tradition. This is not representative of our current demographics, and, unless programs change, people may struggle to connect with or appreciate choral music's relevance.
3. Illinois consists of various cultural settings: urban, suburban, and rural. The needs of directors vary widely across the state.

As leaders, we must adjust what we do or face harsh consequences. IL-ACDA can help directors navigate today's challenges in the following ways.

1. **Share solutions.** Being a choir director can often feel isolating—in an institutional setting, there's usually only one per building. However, we're all facing similar issues and can learn from each other. I suggest exploring ways for members to share the challenges they face and seek input from colleagues across the state. Chorus America has a web-based Open Forum platform where members discuss a variety of topics. IL-ACDA can explore similar ways for members to offer support and encouragement to each other.
2. **Evaluate large-scale programming.** As mentioned above, choir directors are feeling burned out and disillusioned. IL-ACDA should evaluate its current programming (conferences, festivals, publications, etc.) and determine if each is offering value to its members as a whole or if that's simply "what we've always done." The status quo may no longer be effective or sustainable.
3. **Do small, micro-focused events.** In the summer of 2022, I invited two other community choir directors out to dinner to chat about our programs, upcoming seasons, and share insights. We met again a few weeks ago and grew to a group of six. We had a great conversation and are planning to meet again and invite even more people. These small, ad hoc get togethers have been successful because they addressed our very specific needs as community choir directors, were held in low-pressure social settings, were local, and required a little amount of time. IL-ACDA could encourage more of these micro-focused events to build community and meet the varying professional development needs of its membership.

**Describe your relationship to and experience in supporting access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within choral music.**

I am not only deeply philosophically committed to values of ADEIB, but also enact positive changes within my spheres of influence.

I seek to broaden the choral art through the repertoire I program, as well as the commissions and composer residencies I organize. Most recently, I coordinated a commission and residency with Reena Esmail at the Green Lake Festival of Music in Wisconsin. The concert, “Hemispheres Uniting,” reflected Esmail’s blending of Indian and Western musical traditions.

Additionally, throughout my career, I have shared my platforms to uplift underrepresented voices within our community. This is evidenced by the topics and guests I interviewed on *Choir Chat*, the podcast I hosted from 2015–18. These conversations included some of the first choir-focused conversations about gender, trans rights, cultural responsiveness, toxic masculinity, and *Considering Matthew Shepard*.

Finally, I have encouraged my current organization, Chicago Master Singers (CMS), to embrace ADEIB values in its policies. Examples include working with the Board of Directors to approve and implement changes to written materials (members’ handbook, audition process document, etc.) to remove all gendered language and shifting to gender-neutral concert attire.

As President-elect of IL-ACDA, I would work hard to ensure that, as an organization, we continue to not only embrace the values of ADEIB in our words, but also in our actions.

I also want to clarify that I feel that we, as a field and a wider culture, have a long way to go. I therefore personally commit to listening, learning, and growing. My hope is that IL-ACDA can be a safe place for everyone to belong and partner together to do this important work.

**Please tell us about your leadership experience outside of conducting an ensemble. What skills did you use in your leadership role(s)?**

My CV details my experience serving professional organizations, including holding leadership positions at the national, divisional, and state levels of ACDA and NCCO. In addition, I have experience as a department chair, which involved managing a large budget, overseeing faculty and staff, and coordinating a performing arts series. In my current role as Music Director of Chicago Master Singers, I work closely with the Board of Directors to align our innovative goals of expanding our season and diversifying our repertoire within budget targets.

As a leader, I am an “organized visionary.” I articulate a clear, entrepreneurial sense of where we’d like to go and, at the same time, chart the step-by-step actions needed to bring ideas to fruition. I often use the metaphor of myself as a leader as a host of a large gathering—communicating what to expect, stating what the expectations are, welcoming people, and making sure that everyone’s needs have been anticipated and met.

As President-elect of IL-ACDA, I would lead by developing strong personal relationships, keeping the big picture in mind, and making and adhering to specific action plans.

**Tell us about your connections to ACDA and/or to the larger choral ecosystem. How will these connections inform your leadership in ACDA?**

I have been involved in ACDA since my undergraduate days, when I founded a student chapter at Augustana College. Since then, ACDA has been a crucial part of my professional development and career identity.

After living outside of Illinois for almost a decade, I returned in the summer of 2020. This is where my roots and deepest personal connections are. In fact, I'm applying for this role in large part because of the encouragement to do so that I received from an old friend.

Admittedly, I have not been able to contribute directly to IL-ACDA since my return due to the pandemic and schedule conflicts with the Summer ReTreat and Fall Conference. Now that I'm settled, however, I am ready to get involved. I have had a fairly unique career in that I have held various roles within the choral field. I have worked as a K-12 music teacher, church musician, college professor, and now work as a professional conductor. My experience and perspective allows me to break down silos within our field and work well with singers and directors in every arena.

I see myself as a unifier—someone who invites and seeks out collaborations. A specific example of a collaborative effort is Chicago Master Singers' new NextGen initiative, which seeks to support the next generation of composers and singers. It will culminate in a combined concert between composer Elaine Hagenberg, CMS, and choirs from two high schools in February 2024. Additionally, my work with CMS now involves me visiting high schools and colleges and offering clinics free of charge.

More broadly, I have long been interested in the exchange of thoughts and ideas. This thirst for continuous improvement has sparked my work as an writer, podcast host, and clinician.

I would bring my wide-ranging experience and collaborative spirit to the role of President-elect of IL-ACDA and would work to further dismantle the barriers that needlessly exist between choir directors working in different settings.