

As my term as President of the Illinois Counseling Association comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the theme that guided my leadership throughout this year: Leading with Connection.

When I began this journey, I shared my belief that people do not grow, heal, or thrive in isolation. That belief has only been strengthened. I have witnessed firsthand the power of connection among counselors, educators, students, leaders, advocates, volunteers, and community partners who are deeply committed to advancing our profession and serving others with compassion, integrity, and excellence. Serving as your President has been one of the greatest honors of my professional career, providing me with invaluable opportunities to learn, grow, listen, collaborate, and contribute to our Association.

My vision for this year was guided by the Bioecological Leadership Model, which recognizes that individuals, organizations, and communities are interconnected and continuously influence one another. Just as counselors understand that clients are impacted by relationships, environments, systems, and culture, organizations are shaped by the people, structures, partnerships, and communities that surround them. This framework reinforced the importance of collaboration, inclusion, advocacy, leadership development, and building systems that support long-term growth and sustainability.

Throughout the year, ICA advanced its commitment to professional development, advocacy, leadership engagement, and organizational sustainability. Together, we strengthened partnerships, expanded leadership opportunities, supported strategic planning, engaged in vital governance discussions, and worked to ensure our Association remained responsive to the evolving needs of our members.

The primary goal of my presidency was to strengthen the infrastructure supporting our work for future generations of ICA leaders. This included behind-the-scenes efforts to enhance leadership continuity, governance processes, strategic planning implementation, communication pathways, organizational accountability, and institutional memory. I firmly believe that strong organizations are built through intentional planning, collaboration, transparency, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

This year also marked important milestones in our growth. I am pleased to welcome the Illinois Association of Counseling Sexology and Sexual Wellness (IACSSW) as ICA's newest division, and IAVALOR (The Illinois Association for Veterans & Active Line Operators for Response) as our newest chapter. These additions reflect ICA's continued commitment to serving the diverse interests and specialties represented across our profession.

Additionally, I want to congratulate the Illinois Association for Couples and Family Counseling (IACFC) on celebrating its 30th Anniversary of providing outstanding leadership

and education in our state. Congratulations are also due to the Illinois Addiction Advocates Association (IAAA) celebrating its First Anniversary and demonstrating a strong initial commitment to advocacy and education in recovery settings.

One of the accomplishments that brought me the greatest joy was witnessing the impact of our student leaders and the ICA Graduate Committee. Their voices and recommendations helped shape meaningful changes to our Fall Conference, including a dedicated student networking event designed to support professional connection and mentorship for emerging counselors.

The success of this initiative reminds us that meaningful growth occurs when diverse voices are genuinely heard. Our students identified a need, shared their perspectives, and created a solution that strengthened the conference experience. Their contributions reinforced why it is vital to ensure that students, emerging professionals, experienced leaders, and members from diverse backgrounds all have a voice in shaping the future of ICA.

I am profoundly grateful to the many volunteers whose dedication makes ICA possible. Our Governing Council, Executive Committee, Committee Chairs, task forces, Division and Chapter leaders, Regional Representatives, Past Presidents, and student leaders have generously contributed their time and expertise. I also extend my sincere appreciation to our dedicated Association staff, whose essential behind-the-scenes work supports our members, programs, and conferences year-round.

Special appreciation goes to several key partners whose collaboration contributed to ICA's work this year:

- **Steve Anderson**, for educating our leadership on legislative advocacy and public policy.
- **The Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association (IMHCA)**, for its continued partnership and collaboration on advocacy initiatives, particularly during Day on the Hill.
- **Representative Lindsey LaPointe**, for joining us at our conference and for her unwavering support of mental health and counseling.
- **Dr. Victoria Kress (ACA President-Elect)**, the American Counseling Association (ACA), and the ACA Midwest Region for their ongoing guidance, partnership, and commitment to advancing the counseling profession.

Finally, thank you to our conference keynote speakers, presenters, exhibitors, sponsors, attendees, and planning teams. Thanks to your collective investment, ICA experienced one

of its strongest conference attendances in recent years. Achieving this level of engagement during a non-renewal year reflects the vibrant future of counseling in Illinois.

Effective leadership is not about individual accomplishment. It is about creating opportunities for others to contribute, fostering environments where diverse voices are heard, and ensuring that the organization remains stronger than we found. As I transition from the role of President, I do so with absolute confidence in the strength, resilience, and potential of our Association.

To our members, thank you for the trust you place in ICA. Together, we have continued the important work of building an Association rooted in connection, guided by purpose, and committed to supporting counselors and the communities they serve. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving as your President.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Nicole Lucy Thompson-Wade, LCPC

President, 2025–2026 | Illinois Counseling Association

Illinois Counseling Association

2025–2026 Presidential Accomplishments

Dr. Nicole L. Thompson, President

As my term as President of the Illinois Counseling Association comes to a close, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Executive Committee, Governing Council, committee chairs, volunteers, members, Association Director, and our many partners for their collaboration and commitment throughout the year. The accomplishments outlined below reflect the collective efforts of many individuals working together to strengthen the Association and advance the counseling profession.

Governance and Organizational Effectiveness

- Led a comprehensive review of the Illinois Counseling Association's governing documents to strengthen organizational effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.
- Collaborated with the Bylaws Committee, Parliamentarian, Executive Committee, and Governing Council to review and modernize the Association's Bylaws, Policies and Procedures, governance protocols, leadership role descriptions, and committee responsibilities.
- Developed and distributed proposed governance revisions for review and feedback prior to formal consideration by the Governing Council.
- Established a structured feedback process to encourage member participation and thoughtful review of proposed governance changes.
- Advanced recommendations designed to improve succession planning, leadership continuity, committee accountability, and organizational sustainability.

Strategic Leadership

- Continued implementation and monitoring of the ICA Strategic Plan while promoting alignment between organizational initiatives and the Association's mission and vision.
- Supported strategic planning efforts that strengthen the Association's long-term direction and organizational capacity.

Legislative Advocacy and Public Policy

- Collaborated, in my role as ICA President, with Illinois State Representative Lindsey LaPointe and other legislative leaders to increase counselor awareness of legislative initiatives and advocacy opportunities.
- Expanded relationships between ICA leadership, legislators, counselor educators, professional counselors, and advocacy partners.
- Promoted member engagement in legislative advocacy and public policy initiatives affecting the counseling profession.

National Leadership and Professional Advocacy

- Represented the Illinois Counseling Association within the ACA Midwest Region.
- Developed and shared several national thought leadership proposals focused on:
 - Strengthening the professional counseling workforce.
 - Federal recognition of professional counseling.
 - Clinical internship financial support for counseling students.
 - Student professional liability insurance.
 - Workforce development and professional advocacy initiatives.
- Initiated collaborative conversations with ACA and Midwest Region leadership regarding future national advocacy efforts.

Leadership Development

- Promoted leadership development, succession planning, and organizational continuity across the Association.
- Encouraged increased collaboration among divisions, regions, committees, and elected leaders.
- Supported efforts to clarify leadership roles and organizational responsibilities.

Organizational Communication

- Worked to improve communication processes among the Executive Committee, Governing Council, committees, and Association leadership.
- Promoted greater transparency regarding governance processes and organizational decision-making.
- Developed recommendations to strengthen governance communication practices and reporting expectations.

Personnel and Organizational Oversight

- Oversaw implementation of the annual Association Director evaluation process in accordance with ICA governing documents.
- Facilitated Personnel Committee discussions regarding organizational performance, future goals, and continuous organizational improvement.

Policy Development

Supported the development of recommendations addressing:

- Governance communications
- Committee accountability
- Leadership succession planning
- Emergency operational procedures

- Representative reporting expectations
- Conference leadership responsibilities
- Organizational accountability measures

Partnerships and Collaboration

- Strengthened partnerships among counselors, counselor educators, students, universities, legislators, and professional organizations.
- Fostered collaboration between ICA leadership and national counseling organizations.
- Promoted opportunities for interdisciplinary partnerships that support the counseling profession throughout Illinois.

Professional Leadership

- Presided over Executive Committee and Governing Council meetings throughout the year.
- Guided the Association through a significant governance review and organizational transition.
- Supported leadership transition planning to promote continuity for future Association leaders.

Closing Reflection

Serving as President of the Illinois Counseling Association has been an incredible honor. This year has been defined by collaboration, thoughtful governance review, strategic planning, advocacy, and a shared commitment to strengthening our Association for future leaders and members. I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and dedication throughout the year. Together, we have continued building a stronger foundation for ICA and advancing the counseling profession across Illinois.