Letter from the Founder and Executive Director

Welcome to the Illinois Science Council!

Chicago has an impressive array of nonprofit organizations doing great work. For a professional who is “science curious” and wants others to be too, the Illinois Science Council (ISC) Board is a unique opportunity to put your skills to use outside the office. You will have a significant and noticeable impact on the community and enjoy doing so! If you care about science, we want to know you.

This packet provides a snapshot of the first nonprofit in Illinois (possibly the nation) dedicated to raising awareness and appreciation for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) targeted for the adult public. People are very interested in science, but don’t understand it. National Science Foundation polling consistently shows 9 out of 10 Americans “are very or moderately interested in new scientific discoveries and the use of new inventions and technologies,” and yet studies regularly show low levels of science literacy among all ages. Although Americans, on average, spend less than 5% of their life in classroom, the vast majority of funding for STEM education and outreach goes to school and after-school programs. Science deserves to be part of life-long learning experiences and this is where Illinois Science Council targets its efforts.

ISC serves as the science and technology complement to Chicago’s extensive arts and culture offerings. Creating a better understanding of science and technology topics, and of the scientific method, is best done with a light-hearted, entertaining approach. ISC has an impressive track record of producing extremely popular and creative public programs. Having already produced over 100 programs – including hands-on chemistry with local companies, a brain science series, author talks, and more – ISC has a strong reputation for bringing science to the public in fun and engaging ways. We launched the inaugural Chicago Science Festival in May 2015 in partnership with Argonne and Fermi national labs, Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, and others. Our second, larger, Science Festival in May 2016 was very positively received. ISC is positioned for tremendous growth and aims to make the Chicago Science Festival an annual asset for the region.

Chicago – with its extraordinary array of research universities, national labs, science museums, companies, and other scientific institutions – deserves to be known as our nation’s leading “City of Science.” We invite you to consider being a part of our goal to build on ISC’s foundation, to significantly grow the Chicago Science Festival, and expand science outreach programs year-round for all ages. You can be a part of ISC as it benefits the community and makes Chicago known as the City of Big Shoulders and Big Science.

I look forward to speaking with you and answering any questions you may have about ISC and science outreach.

Monica M. Metzler
Founder and Executive Director
mmetzler@IllinoisScience.org
773-929-8993/o 773-848-8993/c
ISC Mission

Illinois Science Council inspires, educates, and entertains the public about science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) by offering a variety of creative and engaging public outreach programs in partnership with area universities, museums, companies, and national laboratories. ISC works to raise awareness, understanding, and appreciation of STEM topics – and of those engaged in important research – by offering opportunities to exercise the human sense of curiosity. We showcase the scientists and the research of Chicago-area institutions to highlight these City assets that make Chicago this country’s leading “City of Science.” We want to build Chicago’s reputation as a vibrant center of science and technology that is accessible to the public and recognized by the world.

ISC Vision

We envision a culture in which:

• People see how science and technology are relevant to their everyday lives and are comfortable discussing it as readily as they discuss music, sports and movies;
• Intellectual recreation in the form of STEM programs is an accepted and accessible part of everyone’s entertainment options, not just for an elite group;
• Scientists and engineers are enthused about sharing their knowledge with the non-scientific public because they are good at it, supported for doing so, and have a variety of available forums for doing so;
• People think critically about information they encounter claiming a scientific basis and expect that firm scientific findings are the foundation for public policy; and,
• Chicago is recognized nationally and internationally as a premiere “City of Science.”

ISC History / Highlights

ISC was incorporated and received federal 501c3 status in 2006 by Monica Metzler when she realized there were thousands of nonprofit organizations in the Chicago area engaged in arts outreach for adults but not one doing similar work for science and technology. The City of Chicago and State of Illinois spend a combined $35 million annually to promote arts and culture, with no similar funding for science outreach.

ISC was established as an independent entity without a fiscal sponsor institution. The intent was to avoid any implication of favoritism towards any one field of science or any one institution to make it clear ISC would engage all areas of STEM and promote all science institutions in the region. ISC enjoys good relationships with the area’s universities, museums, labs and other science institutions, and continually seeks deeper engagement and broader connections.

ISC held its first two public programs (on Meteorology and String Theory) in fall, 2006. Since 2009 ISC has hosted thirteen (usually sold out) hands-on “Chemistry for Adults” programs led by a Northwestern University chemist in collaboration with Chicago-based companies such as Blommer Chocolate, Metropolitan Brewery and Intelligentsia Coffee. In 2010, Monica worked with Dr. Steve Franconeri, a Northwestern University psychology researcher, on a proposal for a “Brain Outreach” series of programs. The result was six-year funding from the National Science Foundation for public programs about the brain and neuroscience. ISC enjoys a great collaboration with the Chicago Public Library, jointly hosting over a dozen science author talks.

Science film screenings, both in Grant Park and with panel discussions, have been a popular ISC programs. In July 2012, with the discovery of the Higgs Boson particle, Monica contacted 137 Films, a Chicago-based documentary film company whose first film was about physicists at
Fermilab searching for the Higgs. A mere eleven days after the discovery’s announcement, ISC hosted a sold-out film screening and discussion for 270 people with ten Fermilab and Argonne Lab physicists who’d worked on Higgs experiments at Fermilab and CERN.

The most recent ISC program success was launch of the inaugural “Chicago Science Fest” in May 2015. It consisted of 14 programs over three days, including a panel discussion featuring Congressman Bill Foster, PhD (the only physicist currently in Congress), an evening of science in art and film, and a full day of science talks on a variety of fascinating topics. This pilot Science Festival received good media coverage and great feedback from attendees. ISC built on that initial effort to expand Chicago Science Fest and, in May 2016, featured 19 talks by scientists plus very popular demo stations in 1871 tech and MATTER healthcare incubators. Science Fest has tremendous potential to be a annual asset to Chicago.

### Joining the Illinois Science Council Board of Directors

Becoming a member of ISC’s Board of Directors is an excellent opportunity if you are a committed individual interested in joining with like-minded people to bring your professional expertise, passion, and dedication to help ISC promote science & technology understanding to the Chicago area in fun and engaging ways. We are seeking candidates who care deeply about science and will commit their time, talents, personal connections, and funds to advance ISC’s mission. That is, professionals who are able to conceive meaningful initiatives to advance ISC’s strategic goals and also take an active part in bringing such initiatives to fruition. ISC is also a place you can be open about your inner (or outer) science “geekiness.”

### ISC Director Responsibilities & Benefits

As a small organization that operates in a very lean capacity, ISC expects the full and active participation of each Director. We anticipate that each Director will:

- Support the mission of ISC and be an advocate for its activities;
- Take responsibility for knowing as much as possible about ISC’s work and outreach;
- Prepare for, attend, and participate in quarterly Board meetings;
- Serve on one or more standing committees or ad hoc groups;
- Make a personally significant donation to ISC annually of at least $1,000;
- Make a demonstrable, measurable effort to raise at least $10,000 annually from corporate or foundation sources;
- Identify and solicit (with the assistance of the Executive Director) new donors to ISC, including individuals, corporations and foundations, as well as other grant, in-kind and pro bono sources; and,
- Identify and recruit talented people for ISC’s Board of Directors and Associates Board.

All ISC Directors can expect:

- A chance to be of service and apply their skills to a very important cause;
- Access to all ISC programs and events, including first chance on likely sell-out programs;
- Recognition, appreciation, and thanks;
- Economical use of their time;
- Opportunities for questions;
- Recognition on ISC’s website and at the fall fundraising event; and,
- Prompt attention from the Executive Director to any requests.