

Queer Choir Handbook

Purpose of Queer Choir Handbook

This handbook offers grounding for how Queer Choir is held, structured, and facilitated—so members can participate and co-create our culture with clarity, care, and shared responsibility. It reminds us what we're here for, what we are (and are not) practicing, and how we want to show up across difference in a time of systemic collapse and cultural disorientation. It is a living guide for cultivating a space of belonging, joy, queer magic, and most of all—singing.

NOTE: Definitions for underlined terms can be found in the Glossary on pages 6-7.

Our Shared Ethos

Queerness defies singular definition. In that spirit, Queer Choir uses “queer” as a noun, adjective, and verb:

- We are a choir made up of *queers* (*n.*) – We belong to a larger constellation and lineage of outsiders, disruptors, and reinventors. Our identities resist conformity and contain fluidity, ambiguity, and becoming. No one must prove or label their queerness.
- We are a choir that is inherently *queer* (*adj*) in who we are, what we sing and how we show up – Our repertoire, relational ethic, pedagogy, and politics embody queerness. We use non-gendered voicing and non-canonical repertoire. We practice reciprocity over obligation, mutual care over martyrdom, and relational boundaries as clarity—not punishment.
- We are *queering* (*v.*) what it means to be in a community choir – We embody non-duality, multiplicity, and paradox. Our container can hold contradiction and complexity without false unity.

From this shared ethos, we aim to uphold these core Queer Choir tenets:

- We are a community choir, *AND* we are more than a choir—we are queer and trans beings cultivating resonance, harmony, and belonging.
- We know singing can be relational and harmony-singing a practice in interdependence. We acknowledge that community is built not by avoiding

conflict but by staying with it in brave, imperfect ways. *AND* Queer Choir is not here to manage members' relationships—we expect singers to take responsibility for their own connections and the health of the whole.

- In Queer Choir, leadership is relational, not control. Elias Wolf, as Founder / Artistic Director, carries varied responsibilities and stewards the choir as a whole, which inherently makes for relational tilt. We acknowledge the influence of this role, *AND* it is not a container for all group needs, nor a place for projection or pedestaling.
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What You Can Expect from Queer Choir

You can expect:

- A consistent space to gather, sing, and grow with queer and trans kin
- Facilitated rehearsals guided by an experienced choir director committed to both musicality and community care
- Skill-building in vocal technique, musicianship, and harmony-singing
- Custom, accessible vocal arrangements rooted in shared values
- Opportunities to be seen and valued as part of the whole
- Light structure: calendars, practice tracks, reminders, seasonal plans
- Support for access needs when shared in advance
- Collective joy, magic, and music-induced goosebumps

Not provided or guaranteed:

- Therapeutic healing, personal transformation, or emotional labor from leadership or other members without consent
 - Facilitation of interpersonal conflict
 - An environment free from risk of harm or symptoms of dominant culture and its oppressions
 - A space that will meet every need for all members
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Our Community Agreements

The following agreements are written in the first person—“**I**”—to invite personal responsibility and reflection. While we sing together with an ethos of “we,” the health of this space depends on each person’s willingness to embody these values directly.

1. Show Up with Intention and Care

I arrive on time, silence devices, and honor the space. I learn music between rehearsals when possible, and offer grace when life doesn't allow. I agree to stay home when I have a known exposure to COVID or other virus, when contagious or experiencing symptoms, or under the influence. I come as I am, while taking care of my own body and my energy; I understand that how I show up ripples outward.

2. Take Responsibility for Myself

I am accountable for my impact, not just intent. I ask for what I need, state my limits, and listen for others'. I tend to my own expectations, especially when feelings of disappointment or disconnection arise. If I miss rehearsal or feel lost, I reach out to my section leader or a choir friend.

3. Stay Curious

I will stay curious in the music learning process in support of the choir as a whole. I will hold space for emergence, non-linearity and changeability as it pertains to the music and rehearsal flow. I understand that the Artistic Director is responsible for programming repertoire and I will trust the vision or sit out the songs that do not resonate or align with my values. In relationship with leadership and other members, I will avoid making assumptions and ask questions before drawing conclusions.

4. Respect Consent and Capacity

I tend to my own needs, and ask for consent before tending to others'. I ask before touching another member, venting to another member, or asking someone to hold any emotional weight. I respect others' boundaries—including "no," "not right now," and "I need help from someone else." When engaging with leadership or other members, I ask before offering critique, i.e. "Would you be open to some feedback?"

5. Practice Integrity and Direct Communication

I speak from my own experience, avoid gossip, and keep stories confidential. I avoid disparaging Queer Choir or its members publicly or on social media. I commit to engaging directly and respectfully with one another when tension arises, or seeking outside support if needed. Conflict is not failure—it's a natural part of being in community. And, Queer Choir does not take responsibility for interpersonal conflict that occurs between community members.

6. Honor Difference and Re-Humanization

I honor the wide range of differences within Queer Choir—neurodiversity, cultural and racialized backgrounds, socio-economic experiences, disabilities (visible and invisible), relationships to music, and more. I stay aware of any assumptions I carry that may be shaped by dominant culture. I do my best to notice and interrupt legacy dynamics and inherited imbalances—patterns passed down through systems like white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism. This includes staying aware of my positionality, stepping back when needed, and practicing more inclusive, re-humanizing ways of being such as:

- Remembering dignity: Recognizing the inherent worth and complexity of each person.
- Undoing objectification: Seeing people as full beings, not as roles, threats, or symbols of harm.
- Resisting systems of dehumanization: Actively disrupting racism, transphobia, ableism, and other forces that reduce people to categories or stereotypes.
- Returning to compassion: Shifting from punishment or blame toward empathy, accountability, and care.

I understand that the following behaviors will not be tolerated, and may be grounds for dismissal from Queer Choir:

- Transphobia, racism, fatphobia, ableism, classism, or other systemic harm
- Verbal, physical, visual, or sexual harassment
- Campaigning against members or leaders
- Abusive, threatening, or manipulative behavior

7. Center Self-Accountability Without Monitoring Others

I commit to honoring our shared agreements as personal practices—not tools for judgment or control. I focus on how I show up, engaging my own growth and trusting that collective culture shifts through personal integrity and relational care.

8. Prioritize Music-Making and Queer Joy

I show up with humility, share space, rest as needed, and support the co-cultivation of belonging through singing in harmony. I honor both struggle and joy, while choosing to center celebration and song.

Conflict and Grievance Processes

Conflict Between Members

If conflict or harm occurs between Queer Choir members, members must take self-responsibility. Some best practices may include:

- Avoiding an assumption of guilt on any party and staying curious.
- Taking space and returning later, if needed.
- Engaging in direct, respectful conversation between those involved, *when and if it feels safe to do so*.
- Discerning between hurt and harm: Hurt is often about discomfort or unmet expectations; harm involves a violation of trust, safety, or consent—especially when rooted in power dynamics or systemic patterns.
- Discerning the difference between feeling safe and being safe. Consider whether you and/or the person with whom you have conflict is behaving from a state of activation or trauma response, and - without judgment - how that mindset may be affecting the nature of conflict.
- Using community resources (such as a therapist, a trusted loved one outside of the choir, or other community mental health resources).
- Apologizing for your part. [Here is how it could look](#).
- Trusting that this is a practice space—not a perfect one.

Please note: Queer Choir leadership will not be mediating between members or holding accountability processes. Members may submit [this form](#) with a grievance, but it is within the sole discretion of the Artistic Director to take action based on what's reported, and that full transparency or resolution may not be available, depending on the circumstances of the conflict or incident.

Conflict with Leadership

If a member experiences tension or rupture in communication with Queer Choir leadership, they are encouraged to engage in direct conversation with the person involved—when and if it feels safe to do so. We recognize the inherent dynamics that come with positional leadership, and we aim to keep communication accessible across roles. If direct communication isn't possible, members may fill out this [anonymized form](#) (with the option to include contact information if follow-up or repair is desired), which will be received by the Artistic Director. When needed, an external mediator may be invited to support the process.

Dismissal from Queer Choir

In cases of egregious or repeated violations of agreements, removal from Queer Choir may occur, with discretion resting with the Artistic Director in consultation with the Queer Choir Advisory Board.

Leadership Roles

Founder / Artistic Director

Steward of vision, operations, and artistic direction. Equal parts conductor, culture-shaper, and manager. Represents Queer Choir as part of Elias Wolf Music (LLC). Reports to: Queer Choir Advisory Board.

Responsibilities include:

- Artistic Direction: Select/arrange repertoire, record practice tracks, collaborate with guest artists/band, shape rehearsals, produce performances
- Organizational Leadership: Maintain calendar, secure venues, manage finances, oversee contracts/registration/volunteers
- Communications: Draft materials, manage website/socials, maintain mailing list, build community partnerships,

Assistant Director

Supports rehearsals with instrumental accompaniment and steady presence. Leads rehearsals when the Artistic Director is absent.

Advisory Board

A small group of trusted collaborators and mentors who support the Artistic Director. This is not a legal or governing board, but a relational circle that helps hold the vision, values, and direction of Queer Choir with care and clarity. The Advisory Board offers thought partnership, perspective, and accountability as the choir continues to evolve.

Glossary of Terms

Reciprocity is a mutual exchange rooted in care and respect—giving and receiving in ways that are not always equal, but are attuned and consensual.

A **relational boundary** is a limit or guideline we set to protect our emotional, energetic, or interpersonal well-being in connection with others. Boundaries clarify what we are available for and how we want to show up in relationship—with care for both self and collective. A boundary is not something we place on another person; it's something we uphold for ourselves, regardless of how others respond.

Nonduality is the practice of holding seeming opposites—like joy and grief, ease and effort—as interconnected rather than separate or in conflict.

Multiplicity is the coexistence of many truths, identities, and experiences within one person or collective, without needing to collapse them into a single, fixed narrative.

Interdependence is the understanding that we are not meant to do everything alone; we rely on each other in ways that honor both autonomy and connection.

Relational tilt is a term used to describe an imbalance in a relationship caused by perceived or actual differences in roles, influence, or authority. In community spaces, relational tilt often refers to what happens when someone (usually a facilitator, teacher, leader) is projected onto (as being more wise, powerful, perfect, or responsible), expected to hold or resolve emotional dynamics or conflict and assumed to have more emotional or relational capacity than they actually do.

Projection is when we attribute our own feelings or beliefs onto another—often unconsciously—shaping how we perceive them regardless of their actual behavior.

Pedestaling is idealizing someone by placing them in a role of exaggerated importance or perfection, which often leads to unrealistic expectations and inevitable disappointment.

Legacy dynamics are the patterns and behaviors we unconsciously carry forward from past systems, institutions, or relationships.

Inherited imbalances are structural inequities passed down through systems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, etc.

Positionality is an awareness of how our identities, backgrounds, and social locations (such as race, gender, class, ability, etc.) shape our perspectives, privileges, and how we're perceived in group spaces. Naming our positionality helps us take responsibility for the impact we have on others and supports more equitable, relational dynamics.

Rehumanizing is the practice of returning ourselves and others to our full, complex humanity—especially after harm or conflict. It invites us to move beyond blame or binaries and reconnect with compassion, dignity, and relational possibility.