

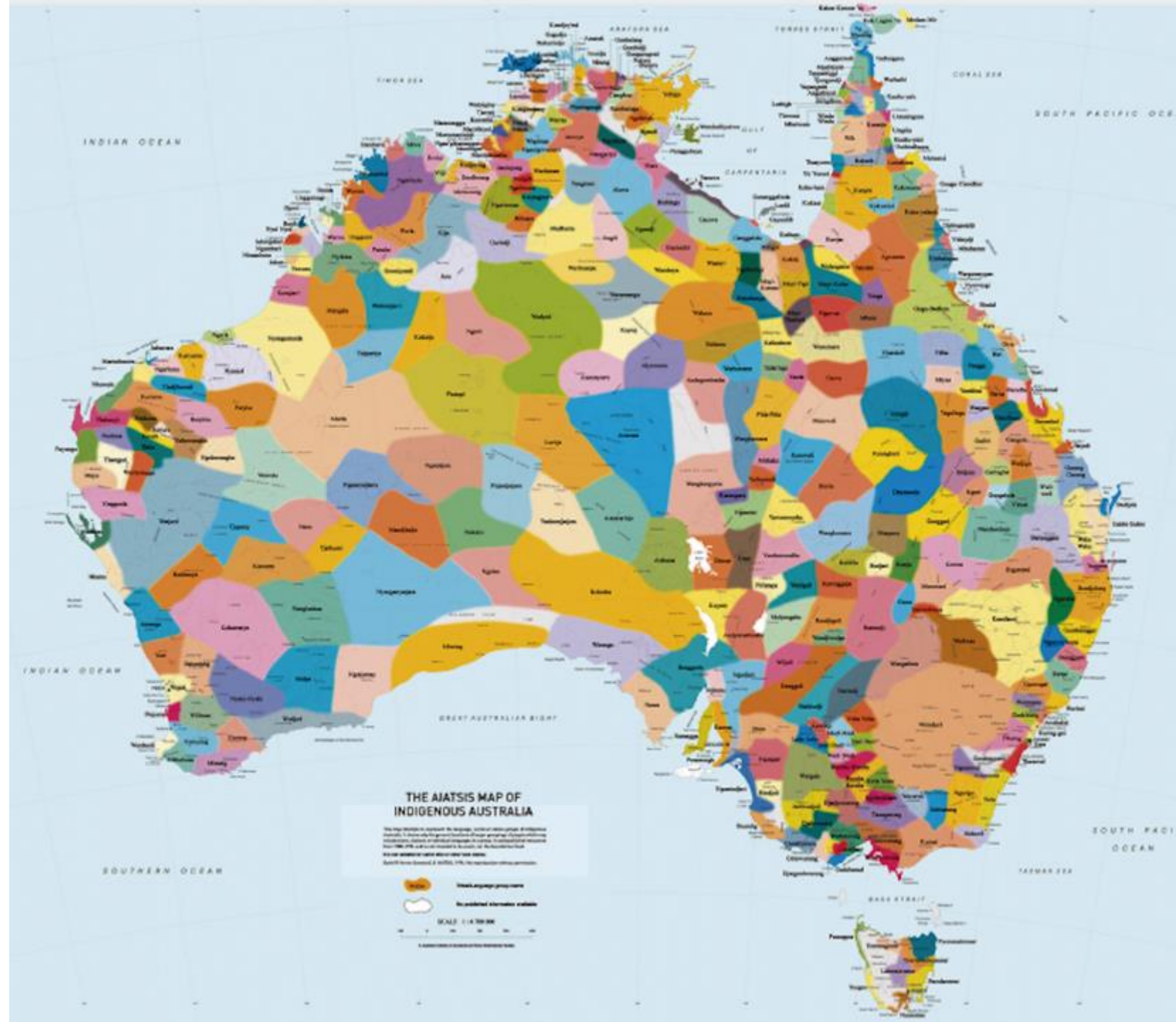
ADVANCED LEADERSHIP FOR CHAIRS

Institute of Community Directors Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

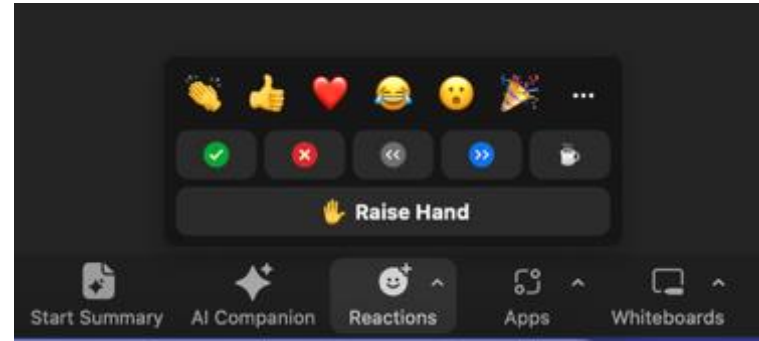
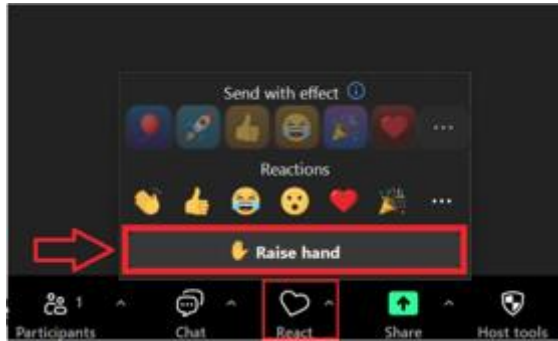
First languages interactive
map: <https://gambay.com.au/>

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Housekeeping

- When you'd like to share with the group on mic, please use the raise hand function.



- Chat function is for everyone to use. Feel free to share your experience and advice, respond to prompts and answer any questions that arise if possible.
- You will receive the slides and the recording via the email you registered with.
- Please don't use AI to summarise or record this session.
- Please mute yourself unless you are speaking to the group.

Nina Laitala

- 20 + years community leadership
- Former CEO Victorian Student Representative Council
- Musician
- Experienced community board chair, deputy chair and secretary



AIMS

To build:

- knowledge,
 - skills,
 - confidence,
 - and connection
- with an ethical lens.**

- Advice
- Stories
- Information
- New ideas
- Discussions
- Respect

EXPECTATIONS



www.linkedin.com/groups/14205581/

OR search Community Chairs Australia



Session structure

Topic – Theme (Guest speaker)

Intro Guest
Content
Group
discussion

BREAKOUT 1
Questions, case
studies

Content
Group
discussion

BREAKOUT 2
Questions, case
studies

Content
Group
discussion
Review

- Breakout groups will be randomly assigned on the night
- You will stay in the same group for each breakout
- Appoint/anoint/volunteer a chair and note taker (and someone to report back)

Program overview

Session 1: The chair as compass and wayfinder (Navigating with an ethical lens)

Nina Laitala, Community Directors trainer

Session 2: Strategic funding: developing your case for support

Catherine Brooks, lawyer with expertise in strategic fundraising

Session 3: The chair's relationship with the CEO

Sheena Boughen OAM, chair of the Australian String Quartet

Session 4: Backstage and front of house: using both to make good decisions

Jeremy Stowe-Lindner, educator and school principal

Session 5: Strategic foresight for chairs: building for a future that's increasingly uncertain

Dr Dalia Ben-Galim, policy and strategy consultant

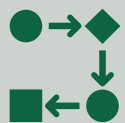
Break out room icebreaker

For the breakout group allocate:

- Chair
- Note taker
- (Who will feedback?)



Introduce yourself to your group - name, organisation



What is your secret weapon as a chair/board member in a word



What do you want to learn and/or experience from this course?

Ethics

noun

eth·ics 'e-thiks

a: a set of moral principles : a theory or system of moral values

b: the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group

c: a consciousness of moral importance

d: a guiding philosophy

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

"Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do."

Potter Stewart
US Supreme Court Judge

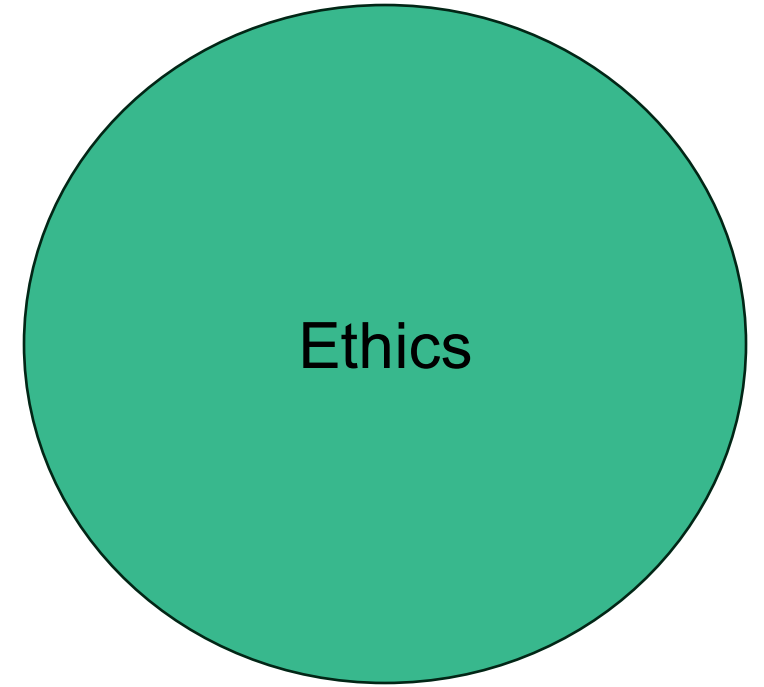
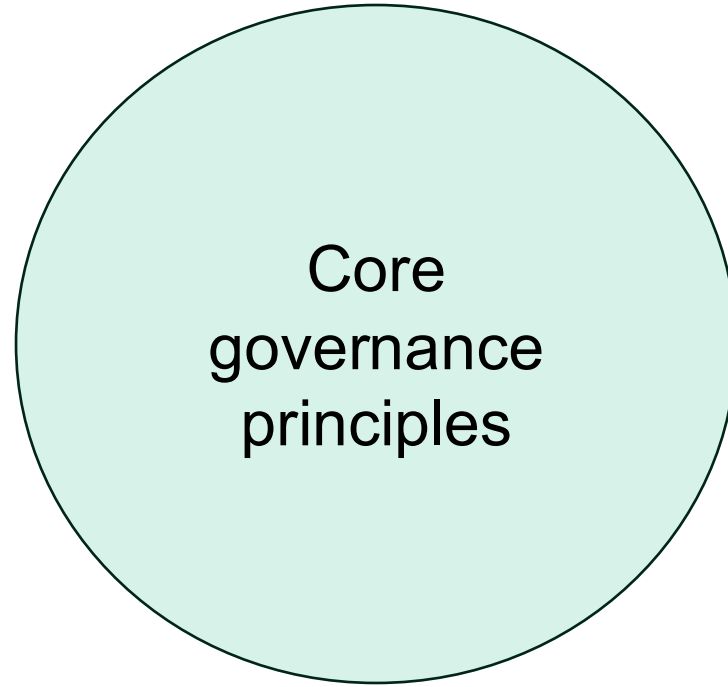
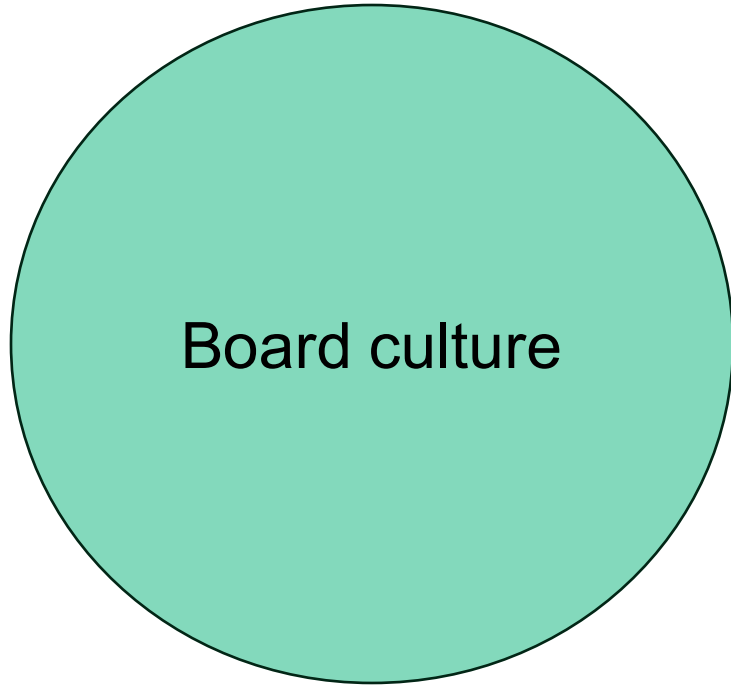
The Chair's role as an ethical leader

An ethical approach to not-for-profit leadership should:

1. set out the fundamental principles that should guide the actions of not-for-profit organisations, and the boards and committees that govern them, and the employees and volunteers who work for them.
2. set out the standards that those who deal with these organisations can expect of them, and their employees and volunteers.
3. require these organisations to build these aspirations into their day-to-day operations, including monitoring and reporting standards, recognition and rewards for compliance, and penalties and sanctions for breaches.

'That is just what they say – they don't really mean it.'

Relationship between ...



Ethics in leadership is like the compass that holds us to true north. But leadership is also wayfinding — applying that compass to navigate the shifting winds and currents of real life.

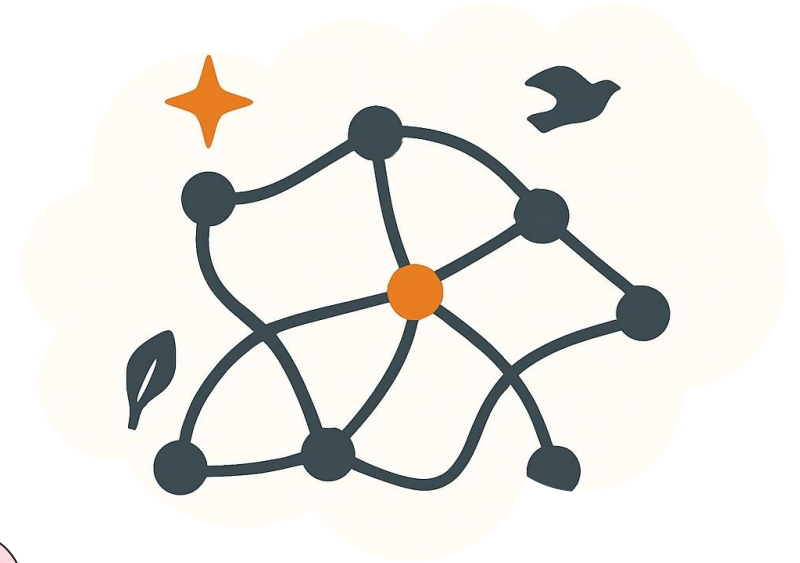
Compass

‘Finding direction by pointing to a fixed reference (true north).’



Wayfinding

‘Finding direction through connection, patterns, and context.’



How does ethical leadership inform or influence these ways of navigation for a community chair?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Take the money?

BREAKOUT

The board of a family violence support service is approached by one of Australia's largest online betting agencies with an offer to sponsor its programs. The sponsorship includes a significant financial contribution, which could help the organisation expand its crisis support services and community education work. The betting agency also proposes a joint awareness campaign to highlight family violence issues.

The financial case is strong. The organisation has fiduciary duties to remain sustainable, demand for services is rising, and the funds would allow it to reach families who currently go without support.

The concerns are equally serious. Gambling harm is woven through many of the lives this service exists to support, with well-documented links to financial stress, relationship breakdown, and family violence.

Frontline staff are uneasy. Some clients have described gambling as part of what happened in their homes. Long-standing sector partners may read the sponsorship as a sign the organisation has lost its bearings. The trust, lived experience, and relationships that underpin this work are not visible on a balance sheet, but they are real.

The chair holds both realities.

One points toward financial strength and expanded reach.

The other points toward the integrity of the organisation's voice and the trust of the people it exists to serve.

Take the money?

The dilemma

A family violence support service is offered significant sponsorship by one of Australia's largest online betting agencies, including funding to expand crisis support and a joint awareness campaign on family violence.

The pull toward yes

Strong financial case, and a fiduciary duty to stay sustainable

Rising demand for services

Reach for families currently going without support

The pull toward caution

Gambling harm runs through many of the lives this service supports, linked to financial stress, relationship breakdown, and family violence

Frontline staff are uneasy

Some clients describe gambling as part of what happened in their homes

Sector partners may read it as the organisation losing its bearings

Trust and lived experience do not sit on a balance sheet, but they are real



The chair holds both

One reality points to financial strength and expanded reach. The other points to the integrity of the organisation's voice and the trust of the people it serves.

BREAKOUT

1. What duties, risks, and relationships should inform the board's reading of this situation, and where might they pull in different directions?
2. As chair, how would you design a board conversation that genuinely holds both the strategic and the relational, rather than letting one override the other?
3. What would it cost to accept the sponsorship and be wrong, and what would it cost to decline it and be wrong? Is there a third path the board has not yet considered?

*'The compass reminds us that we need steady principles and clarity about what's right.
The wayfinder reminds us that ethics is also lived in relationships, context, and responsiveness.'*

Compass 	Wayfinder 
Provides a steady point of reference	Reads patterns and relationships
Always points to “true north” → values, mission, purpose.	Draws on stories, culture, and environment for guidance
Brings clarity in uncertainty	Brings connection and meaning
Keeps the board aligned	Keeps the board attuned
Ensures direction doesn't drift	Ensures direction remains grounded in context

Break!



The merger question

Background

You are the chair of Riverbend Community Services, a mid-sized not-for-profit that has been operating for 32 years in a regional area. Riverbend provides family support, financial counselling, and a small but much-loved community hub that hosts playgroups, men's shed activities, a weekly community lunch, and cultural gatherings. The organisation employs 18 staff and has around 60 active volunteers, many of whom have been involved for decades.

Riverbend is financially stable but not thriving. Government contracts have tightened, reporting requirements have grown, and the CEO has flagged that the next three years will be challenging without significant investment in systems, compliance, and fundraising capacity.

The opportunity

A larger metropolitan not-for-profit, Horizon Care, has approached your board with a merger proposal. Horizon is well-resourced, professionally run, and has a strong reputation for service delivery and compliance. They see Riverbend as a valuable regional footprint and have offered generous terms: all current staff retained for at least two years, the Riverbend name kept as a sub-brand, and a commitment to continue all current programmes.

The CEO is cautiously supportive. The treasurer is enthusiastic, pointing to the financial security it would bring. Two board members, both with corporate backgrounds, see it as a clear strategic win.

The quieter voices

Over the following weeks, you start to hear other things.

A long-standing volunteer, whose family has been connected to Riverbend for three generations, stops you after the community lunch. She says, "I hope you're not going to let them swallow us up. This place is us."

The coordinator of the weekly cultural gathering, run in partnership with local First Nations community members, asks for a quiet conversation. She tells you that the relationships underpinning that programme took 15 years to build, and they are held by specific people, not by contracts. She is worried those relationships won't survive a change in organisational identity, even if the programme technically continues.

A board member who grew up in the area and has been quiet through the early discussions finally speaks up in a one-on-one with you. She says, "On paper this looks sensible. But I've seen what happens when regional organisations get absorbed. The head office makes decisions for us, and within five years we're a service outlet, not a community."

At the same time, Horizon's CEO follows up warmly and professionally, asking when the board can meet to progress discussions. The funding environment continues to tighten.

BREAKOUT

The decision point

At the next board meeting, the treasurer tables a paper recommending the board enter formal merger negotiations. The paper is well-researched and makes a strong financial and strategic case. It notes that delaying the decision carries risk, as Horizon has indicated they are also in early conversations with another regional organisation.

Two board members want to vote tonight. Two want more time for community consultation. One is undecided. As chair, you hold the casting vote in the event of a tie, and you sense the room is looking to you for direction.

1. What is the ethical role of the chair in this moment? Is it to bring the decision to a clean vote, to slow the process down, or something else?
2. How do you honour both the compass (fiduciary duty, strategic responsibility, timeliness) and the wayfinder (relationships, cultural continuity, community voice) in how you chair this discussion?
3. What questions might you ask the board before any vote is taken?
4. What might it cost you, personally and as a board, to get this wrong in either direction, too compass-led or too wayfinder-led?

The chair as ethical compass

1. Revisit and ground discussions in purpose and values
2. Ask the “True North” questions
3. Model steadiness in uncertainty
4. Provide clarity around roles and boundaries
5. Curate the agenda with intention

Ethical wayfinding as a board

1. Scan the horizon ethically
2. Scenario think with integrity
3. Listen to diverse voices
4. Govern with flexible principles
5. Celebrate ethical course corrections

Reflections from today's workshop

- A key takeaway

What does my board
most need from me
right now – to act
more as a compass
or more as a
wayfinder?

Next week

Session 1: The Chair as Compass and Wayfinder (Navigating with an ethical lens)

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Session 2: Strategic funding: developing your case for support

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