

# ADVANCED LEADERSHIP FOR CHAIRS

## Community Directors

**Presenter:** Jon Staley, Trainer Governance & Community Leadership

# Acknowledgement of Country

Join in via chat

*'Hi I'm Jon from Our  
Community and I am  
joining today from  
Wurrundjeri woi-  
wurrung country in  
Melbourne ...'*

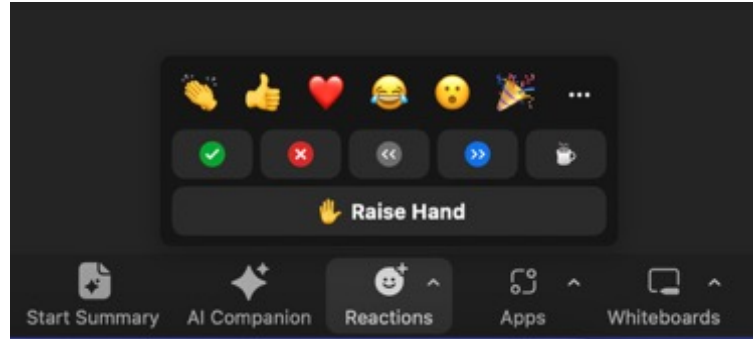
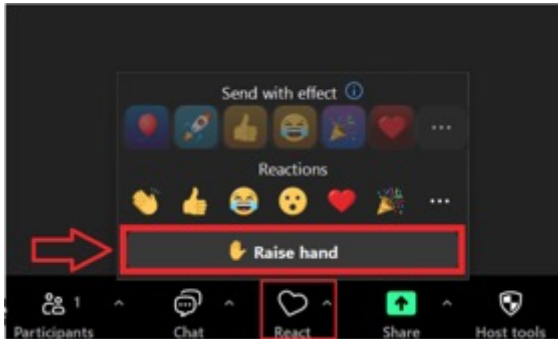
First languages interactive  
map: <https://gambay.com.au/>

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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 have access to the slides and the recording via the portal.
- Please don't use AI to summarise or record this session.
- Please mute yourself unless you are speaking to the group.
- We will have a quick break around the halfway point

# A little bit about me

**Jon Staley**

ICDA Trainer Governance & Community Leadership

- 25 + years community leadership
- 10 + secondary/vocational teacher
- Founder Youthworx (non-profit social enterprise)
- Filmmaker/writer
- Community board member



## 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/](https://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)**

Jon Staley, ICDA Trainer

## **Session 2: The Chairs relationship with the CEO**

Sheena Boughen OAM, chair of the Australian String Quartet

## **Session 3: Backstage and front of house: using both to make good decisions**

Jeremy Stowe-Lindner, educator and school principal

## **Session 4: Strategic funding: developing your case for support**

Catherine Brooks, lawyer with expertise in strategic fundraising

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

Dr Dalia Ben-Galim, policy and strategy consultant.

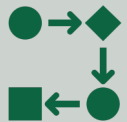
# Break out room icebreaker

**For the breakout group allocate:**

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



Introduce yourself to your group - name, organisation



What is a key strength you bring to the role of chair/board member?



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

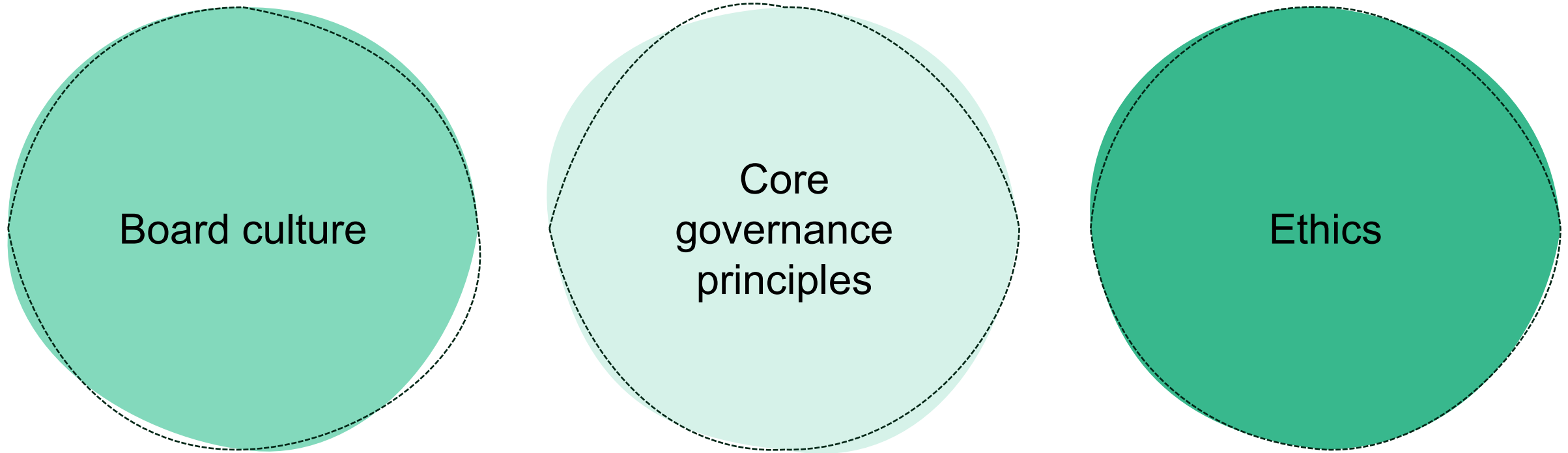
# The Chair's role as an ethical leader

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.

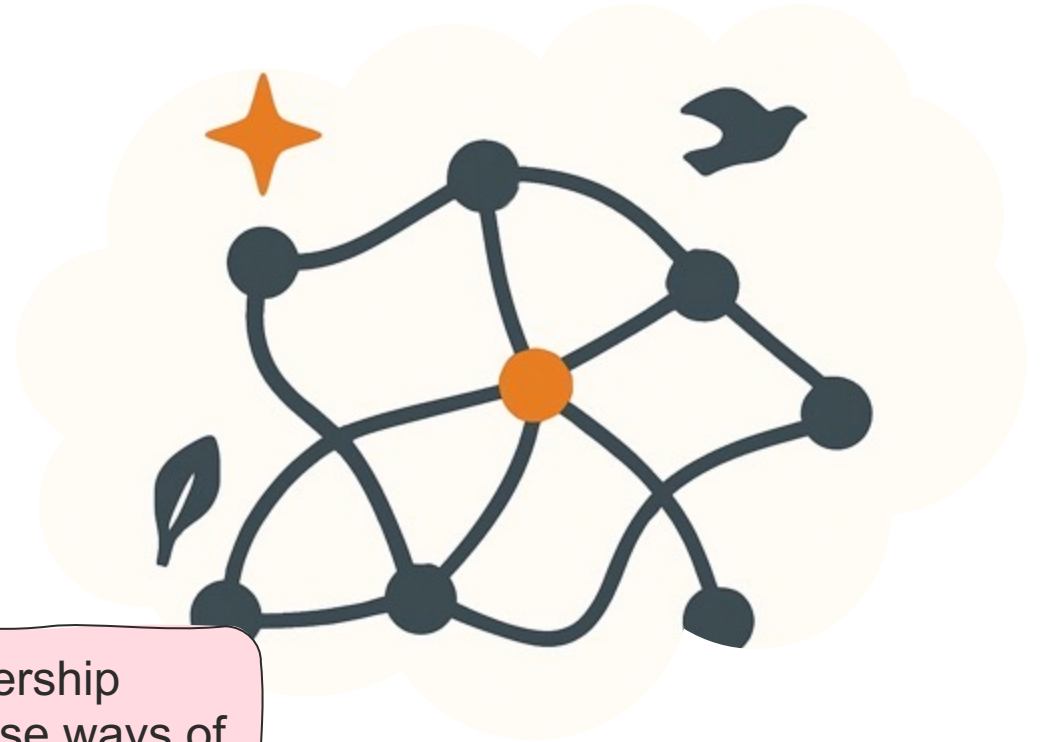
# Compass

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



# Wayfinding

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



How is ethical leadership connected to both of these ways of finding direction?

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

# 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 should the board be weighing here, and where do those considerations pull in different directions?
2. As chair, how would you help the board explore both the strategic and relational dimensions of this decision, without allowing one to override the other?
3. What might it cost to accept the sponsorship and be wrong? What might it cost to decline it and be wrong? Is there another path the board should explore?

**Break!**



*‘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.’*

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

# The merger question

## Background

You are the chair of fictional organisation 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.

- What is your compass telling you at this stage?
- What principles, duties, or strategic considerations point you in a particular direction?

## 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.

## 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.

## BREAKOUT

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:

## Navigating with Principles

### 1. Revisit and Ground Discussions in Purpose and Values

Bring the board back to the mission, **while explicitly asking about ethical implications**. Encourage reflection: *Are our actions advancing good, avoiding harm, and respecting stakeholders?*

### 2. Ask the “True North” Questions

Questions like “*How does this decision serve our mission?*” and “*Does this align with our values?*” E.g. *Are we acting fairly, transparently, and with integrity?* True north is not just strategic—it is morally oriented.

### 3. Model Steadiness in Uncertainty

Show calmness in ambiguity **while making principled choices**. Demonstrate that ethical reasoning—considering justice, equity, and impact—is part of effective leadership.

### 4. Provide Clarity Around Roles and Boundaries

Ensure everyone knows what is governance vs management, **and how ethical accountability fits within each**. Boundaries support responsible oversight and prevent harm or misuse of power.

### 5. Curate the Agenda with Intention

Focus on issues that matter for long-term mission and values. Ask: *Which items most affect ethical outcomes? Where might our choices create risk or opportunity for stakeholders?* This keeps the board oriented toward both direction and principle.

# Wayfinding with Ethics:

## Navigating Responsibly as a Board

### 1. Scan the Horizon Ethically

Regularly explore external trends, community shifts, and emerging risks/opportunities. Ask: *Who benefits, who may be impacted, and does this align with our values?*

### 2. Scenario Think with Integrity

Test “what if” pathways and adaptive strategies, considering fairness, equity, and ethical consequences. Ensure flexibility doesn’t compromise principles.

### 3. Listen to Diverse Voices

Engage staff, community, and partners deeply. Pay attention to inclusion, justice, and underrepresented perspectives—like reading the currents to steer wisely.

### 4. Govern with Flexible Principles

Allow course corrections when context changes, while staying anchored to mission and core ethical standards. Adaptation is strategic **and responsible**.

### 5. Celebrate Ethical Course Corrections

Recognise that small adjustments guided by values and ethics strengthen leadership. Changing tack to do the right thing is a sign of wisdom, not weakness.

# Reflections from today's workshop

- A key takeaway
- Next session

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

# What's next

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