

Good Governance for Sustainable Open Source Projects

Community Over Code Glasgow 2026

Dr. Dawn M. Foster

OSS Strategy Consultant. CHAOSS, OpenUK & Software Stewardship Lab Boards

<https://fastwonderblog.com/2025/12/03/good-governance-for-open-source-projects>

-  <https://fastwonderblog.com/>
-  <https://github.com/geekygirldawn>
-  @geekygirldawn@hachyderm.io
-  [@geekygirldawn.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@geekygirldawn)

Agenda

- **What is Governance?**
- **Why governance?**
- **Defining OSS Project governance**
- **Pathway to leadership**
- **Creating intentional culture**
- **Project ownership decisions**
- **Cautions and potential hazards**

Photo by Marco Verch - CC BY 2.0

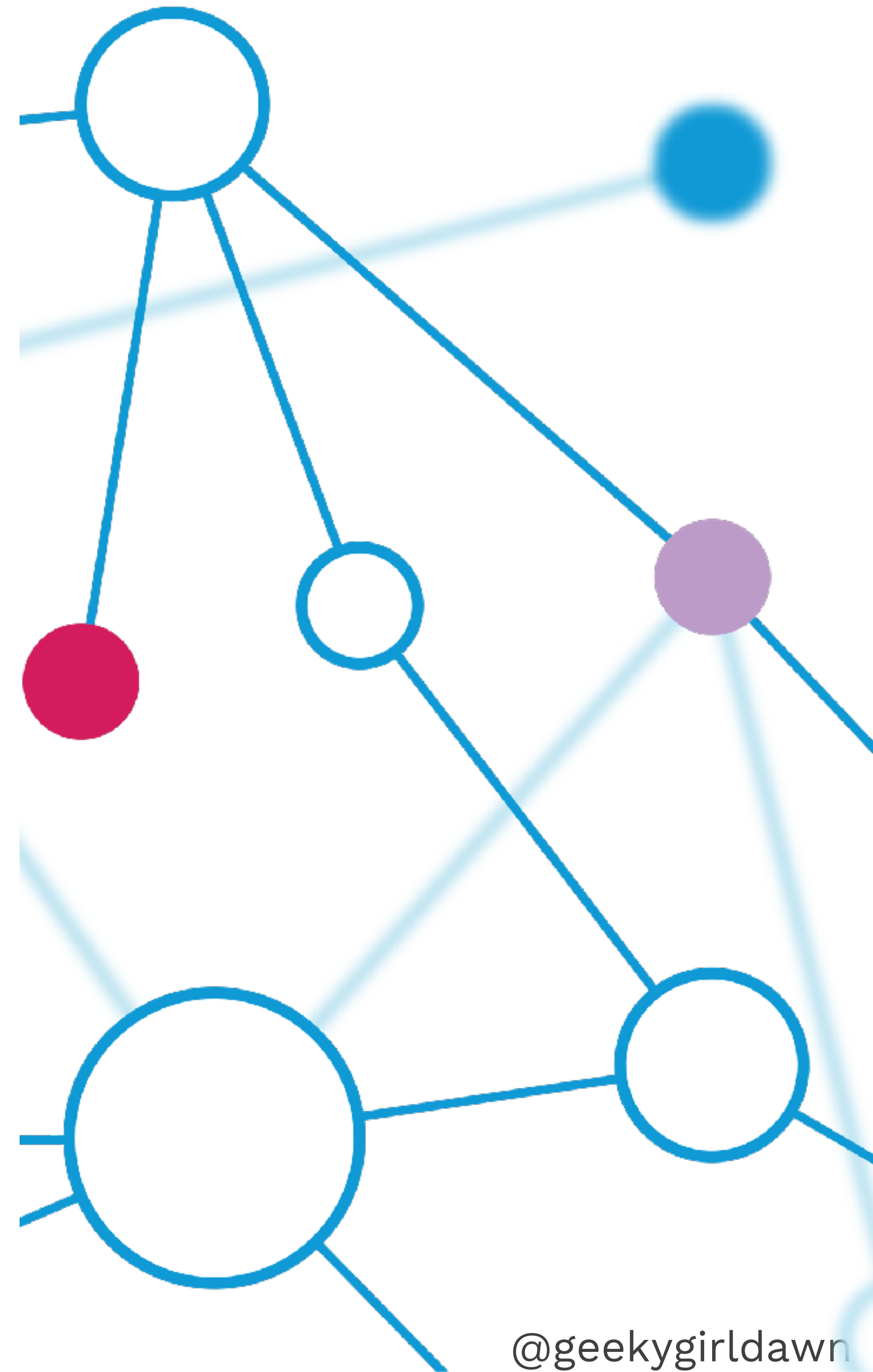
Whoami



- Geek, traveler, reader
- 30+ yr tech career focused on open source (VMware, Intel, Puppet, ...)
- Open Source Strategy Consultant
- OpenUK Board
- Software Stewardship Lab Director
- CHAOSS Board and WG lead
- Previous CNCF TAG Co-Chair
- PhD on Linux kernel collaboration

Photos by Mom, the Linux Foundation, and me

What is Governance?



What is Governance?

Governance is a framework of processes, structures, rules, and norms based on relationships, interactions, power dynamics, and communication within an organized group of individuals

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governance>



Context is Important

Governance may refer to ...

Governments

Societies

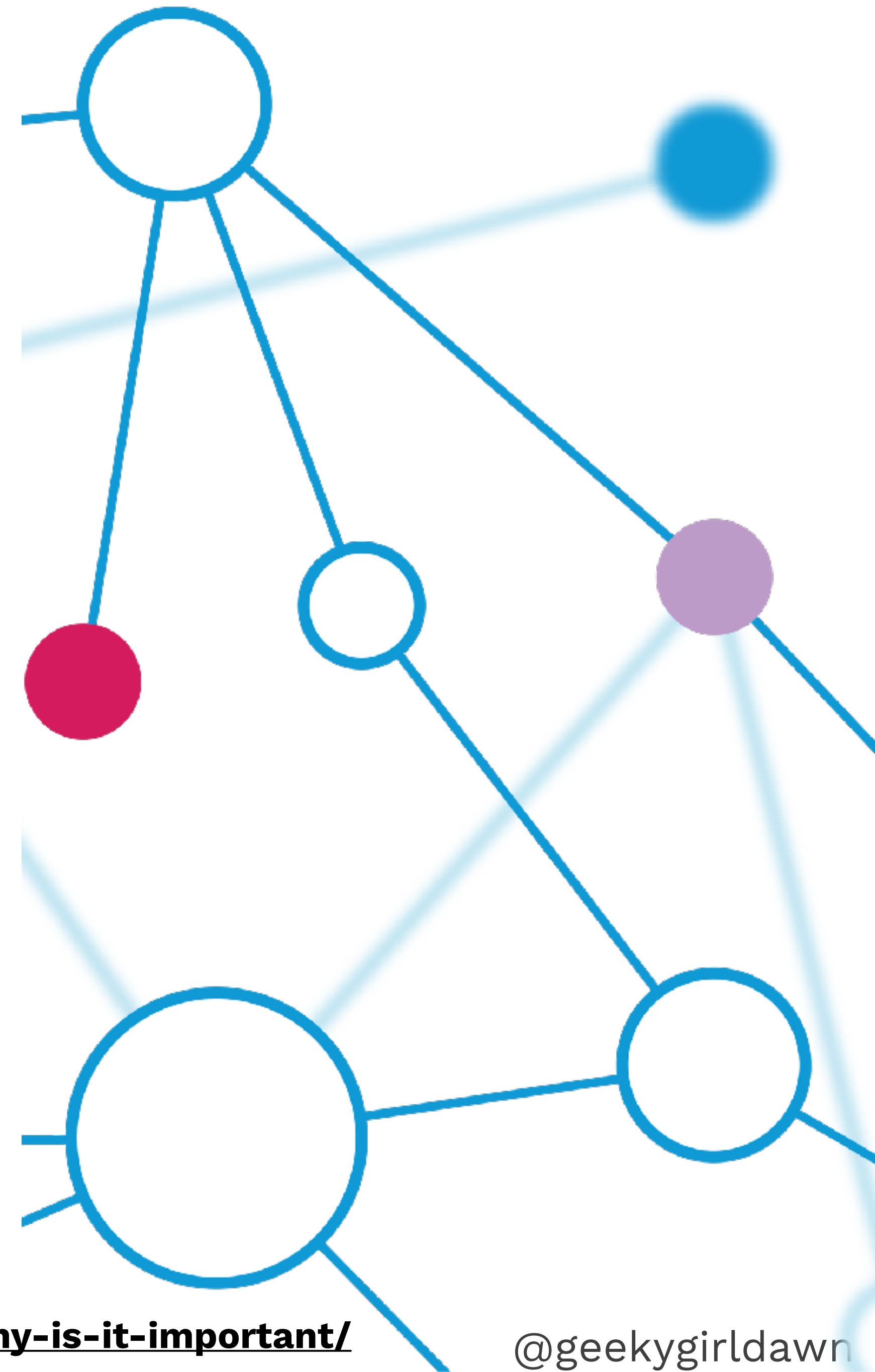
Companies

Communities

Open Source Projects



Why Governance?



Be Proactive

**Governance may
not seem important
until you really need it,
but then it's too late**



About People

Defines how people
collaborate and
make decisions



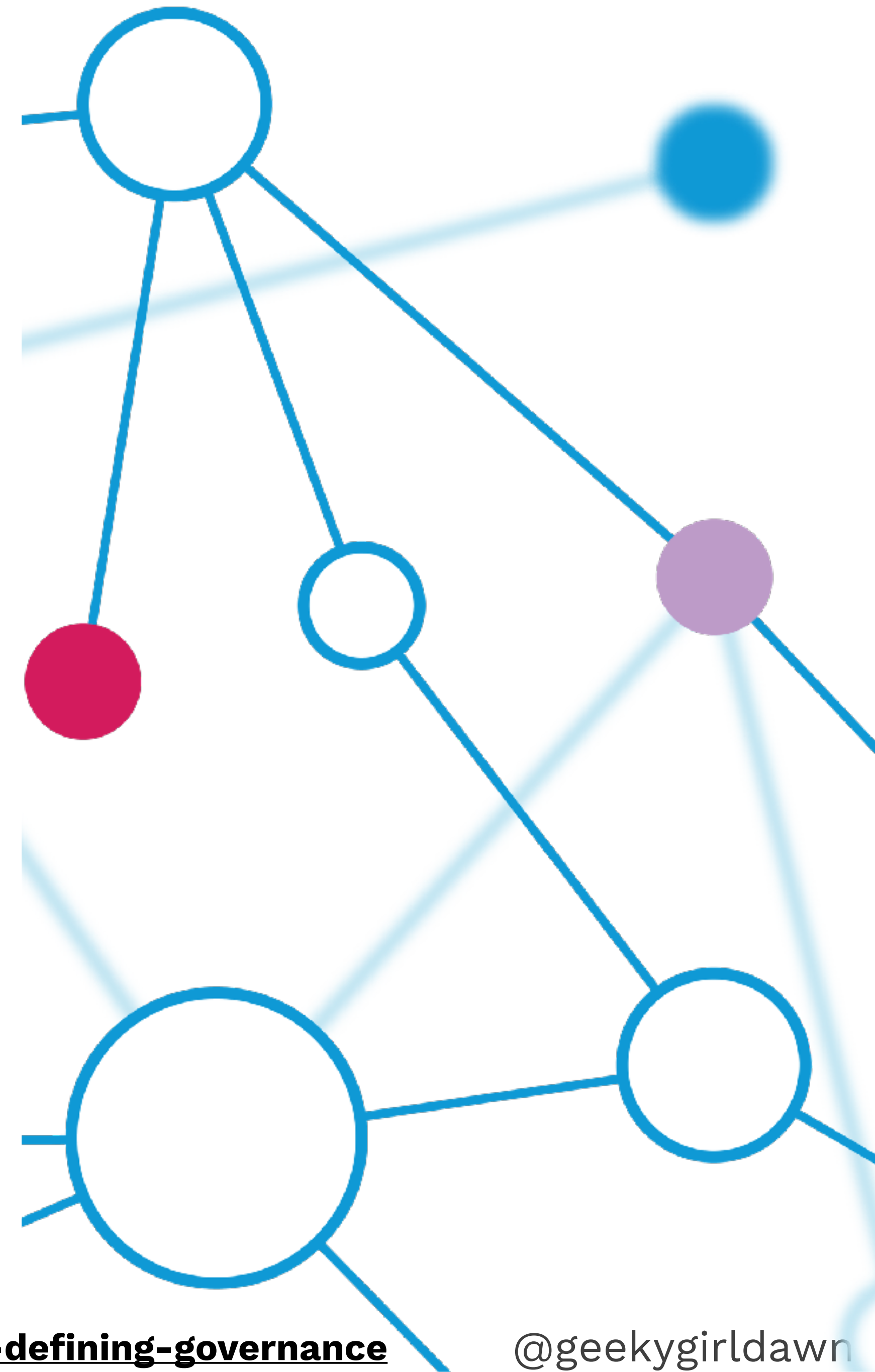
Be Explicit

**Explicit, documented
governance increases
project viability**



Defining OSS

Project Governance



Current Governance

Start by documenting your existing decision-making processes, leadership selection, and other elements of governance



Key Elements

- **Link to your Code of Conduct**
- **Leadership selection process**
- **Processes for removing people (voluntary and involuntary)**
- **Voting – actions that require a vote**

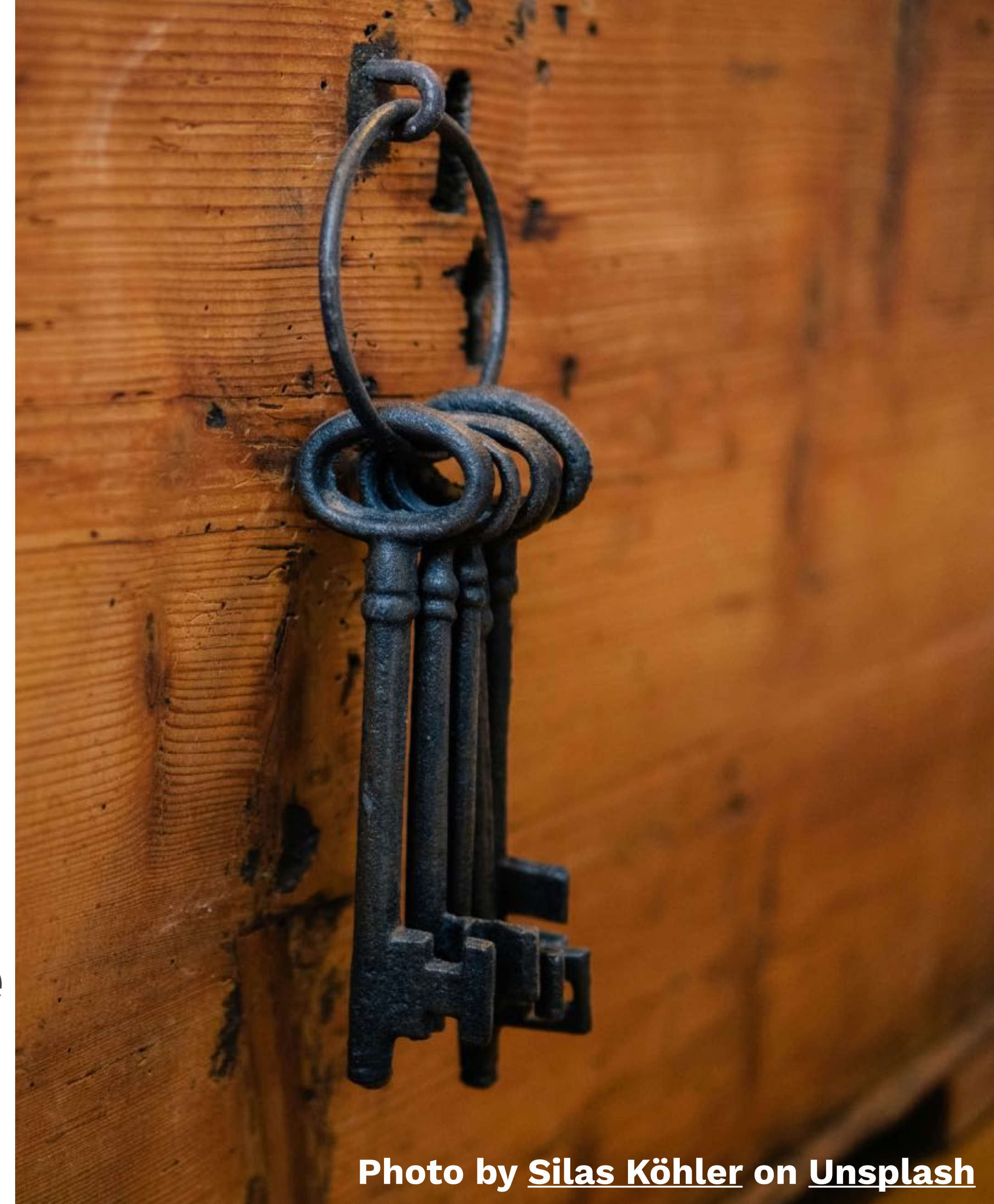


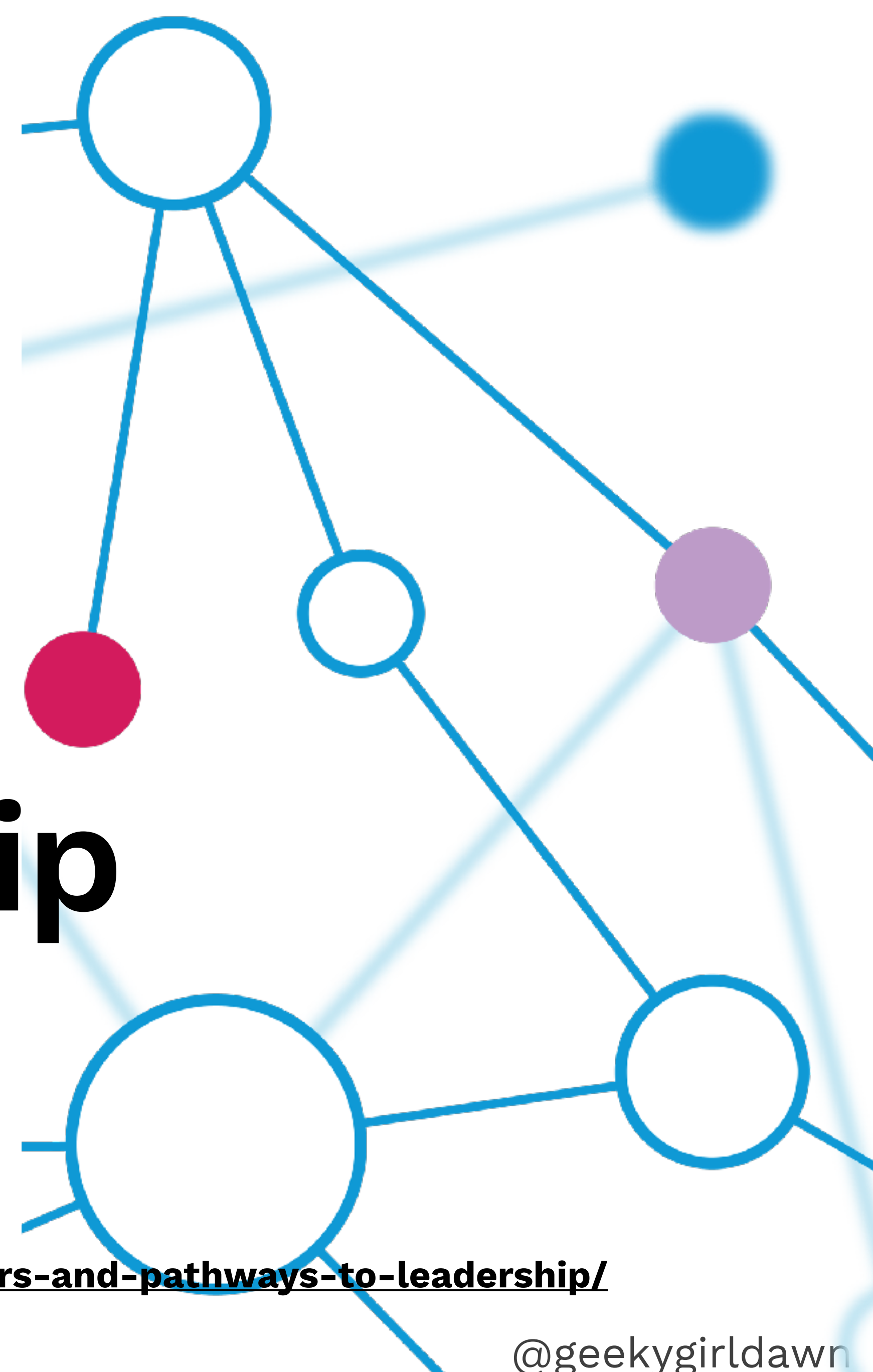
Photo by [Silas Köhler](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Start Simple and Adapt

Start simple, but
evolve with your project
and adapt to
changing needs



Pathway to Leadership



<https://fastwonderblog.com/2025/08/12/governance-part-3-new-contributors-and-pathways-to-leadership/>

Contributor docs

Grow your contributor base
and scale your project
over time



Leadership

**Contributors can
climb the ladder
into leadership**



Emeritus

**Set your project
up for success
even when some
people leave**



Creating Intentional Culture



Inclusion

**Building a
welcoming, diverse,
and inclusive
community**



Security

Process for
reporting and
responding to
security issues.



Image by [darwin Bell](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

Mission

Purpose, advantages,
and key features



Image by Todd Lappin CC BY-NC 2.0

Scope

**Avoid misunderstandings
and set expectations**



Values / Principles

Openness

Fairness

Community over Company

Inclusivity

Culture of participation



Project Ownership Decisions

<https://fastwonderblog.com/2025/08/31/governance-part-5-overall-ownership-of-a-project/>

dawn@fastwonder.com

@geekygirl dawn

Company Owned

Be honest and
realistic about
how people can
participate and
who can lead



Foundations

Neutral foundations allow
collaboration as equals



Contributing to Foundations

Give up control for
increased
collaboration



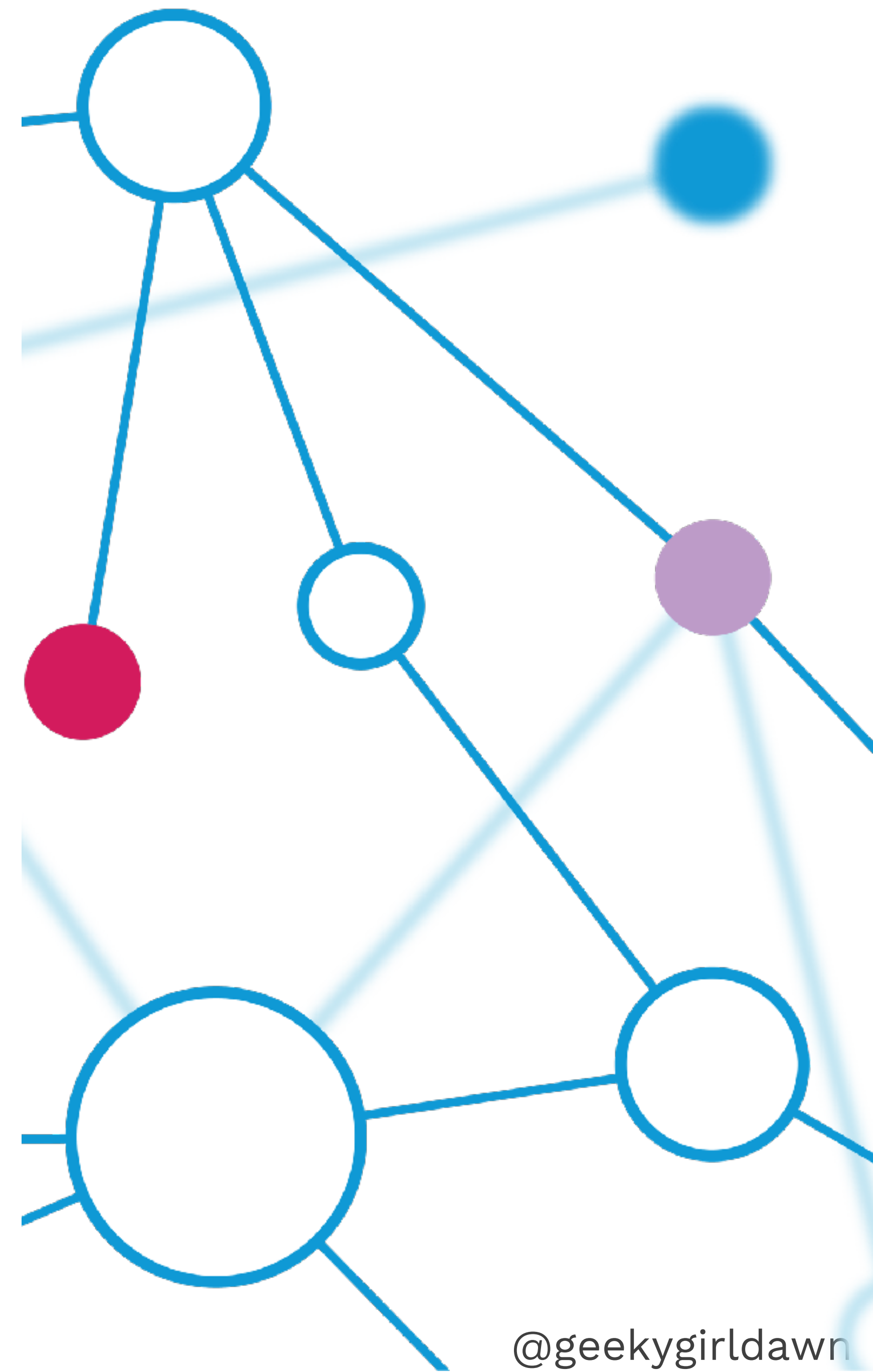
Governance Evolves

Never "done" and
can always
be improved



Image by [kuhnmi](#) CC BY 2.0

Cautions and Potential Hazards



It's Hard

People have feelings
and change is hard,
especially for people
deeply invested in a project



Photo by [Nik](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Expectation Setting

**Role model good behavior
because tolerating
bad behavior
makes it seem acceptable**



Removal

**Important to have a process
for removing people
(voluntary and involuntary)**



Final Thoughts

**Take time now to work
on governance to set
your project up
for success**



Photo by [Afif Ramdhasuma](#) on [Unsplash](#)

THANK YOU!

Any Questions?



<https://fastwonderblog.com/2025/12/03/good-governance-for-open-source-projects>

 <https://fastwonderblog.com/>
 <https://github.com/geekygirldawn>
 @geekygirldawn@hachyderm.io
 [@geekygirldawn.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@geekygirldawn)

