

Fixing the leadership gap threatening open source projects

Community Over Code Glasgow 2026

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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

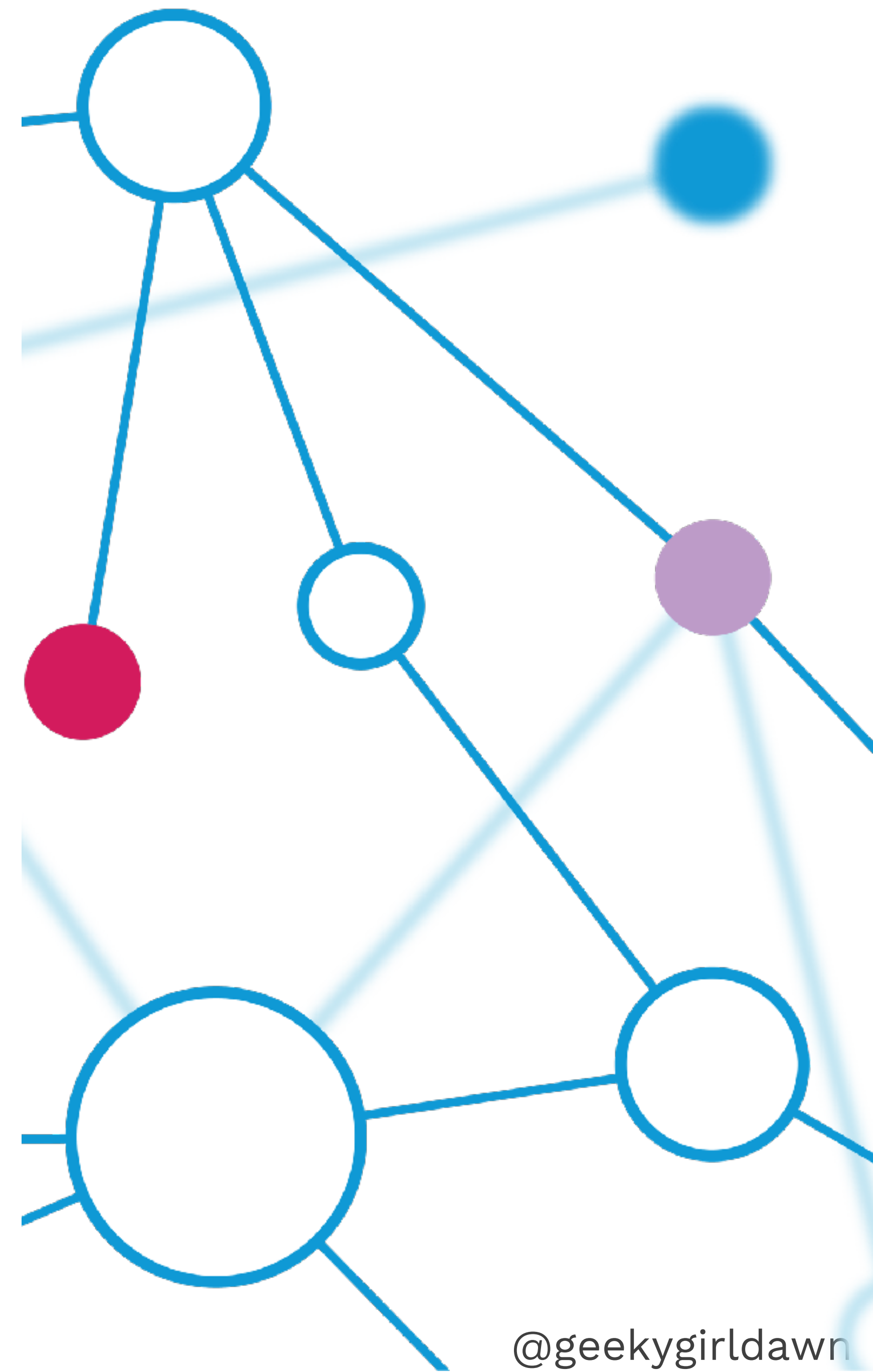
Agenda

- Inclusive leadership principles
- Recruiting leaders
- Good governance (more tomorrow)
- Individual actions

Photo by Marco Verch - CC BY 2.0

Inclusive Leadership

Principles



OSS Leadership Defined

**Anyone in a decision-making role
or position of influence:
committer, reviewer, maintainer,
community manager,
documentation lead, PMC,
steering committee, board ...**



Opportunities

Up and coming
community members need
opportunities to move into
leadership positions



Diverse Leadership

People from a variety
of backgrounds
should be represented
within leadership



Expectation Setting

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

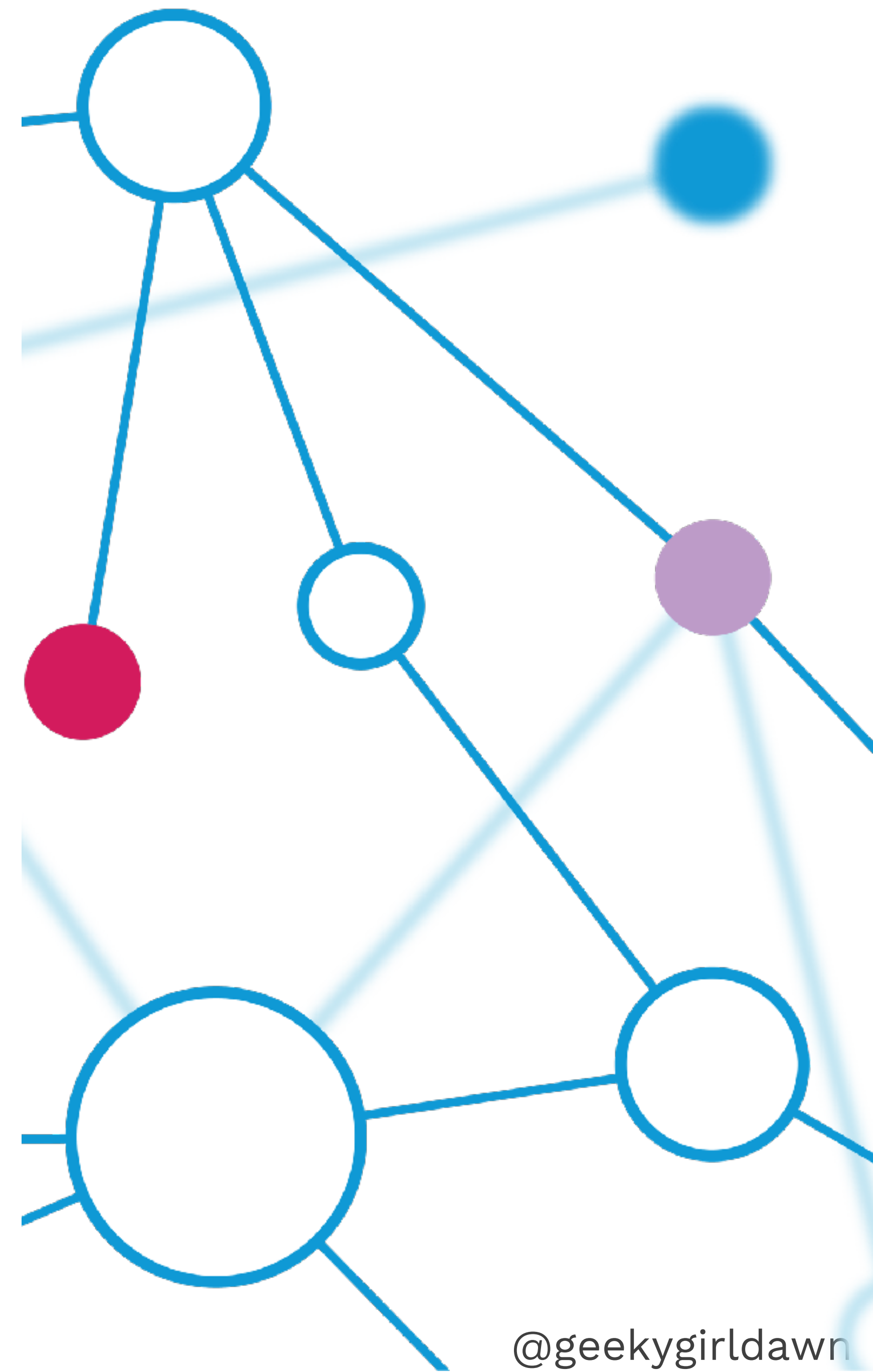


Path to Emeritus

**Set your project
up for success after
maintainers move on.**



Recruiting Leaders



The Problem is Hard

Maintainers and leaders are
burning out and need
new people to help out



Motivation

Working in the open, but
being proactive and asking
specific people for help
can help us feel useful,
appreciated, and welcome



Onboarding Docs

**Good docs for onboarding
new contributors is step #1
toward scaling maintainers**



Roadmaps

Working in the open to
collaborate on project
plans, goals, and next steps.

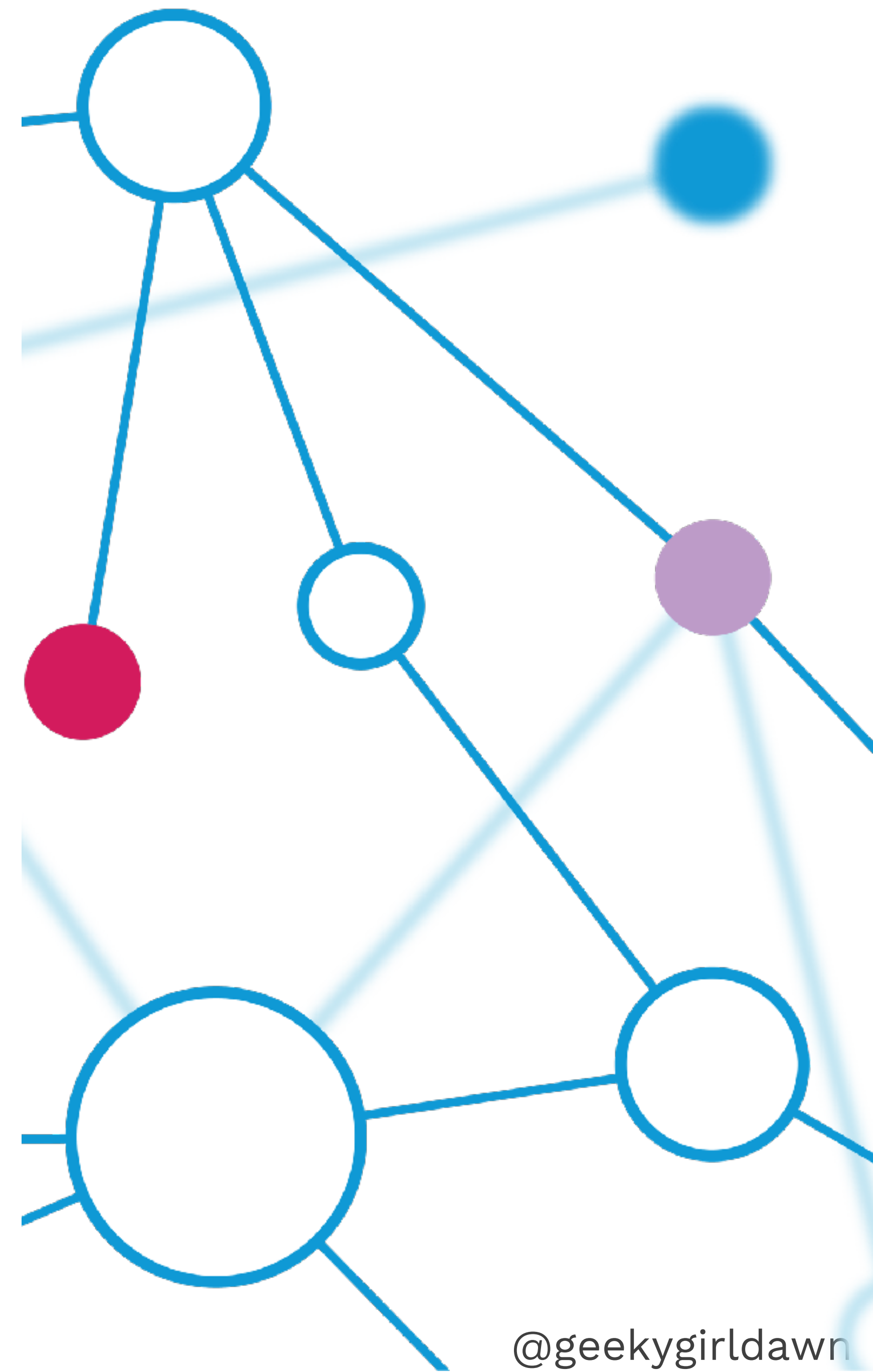


Contributor Ladders

**Defining a ladder of leadership roles
helps recruit new humans
to reduce maintainer workload.**



Good Governance



Good Governance for Sustainable OSS Projects

14 October 2026 17:00-17:40 GMT

Governance and Poli...

Tweed

We all want our OSS projects to be sustainable, healthy, and successful, and having good governance influences project success more than many people realize. The audience will learn about key elements of governance and how good governance can lead to a more sustainable OSS project.



Dr. Dawn Foster
Open Source Strategy Consultant
Fast Wonder

Governance is all about the Humans

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



Image by the [CNCf](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

Be Proactive

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



Start Simple and Adapt

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



Governance Evolves

Never "done" and
can always
be improved



Image by [kuhnmi](#) CC BY 2.0

It's Hard

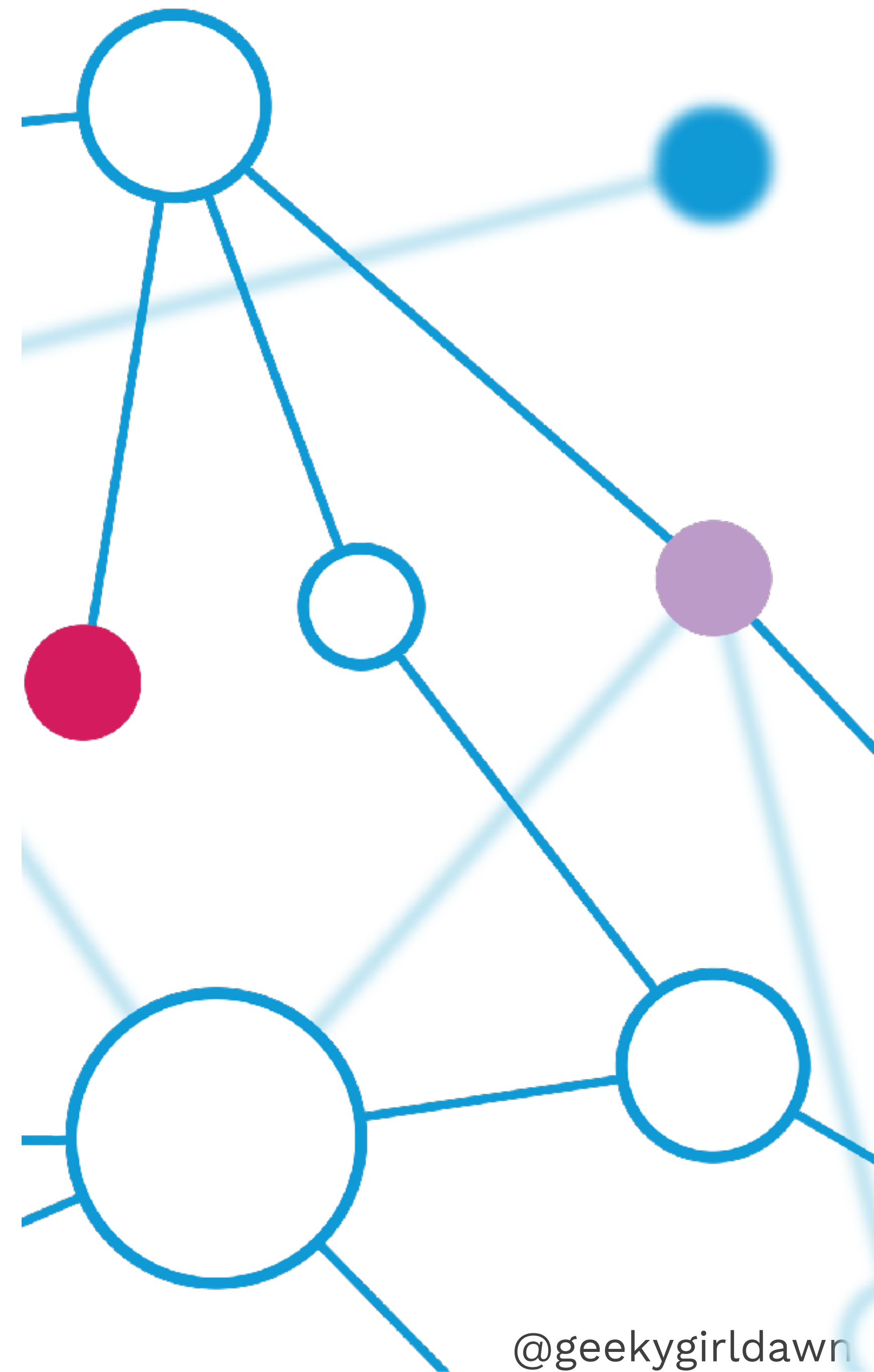
People have feelings
and change is hard,
especially for people
deeply invested in a project



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

Individual Actions

aka What can I do?



Provide Funding

Provide funding for
open source maintainers,
projects, infrastructure,
and research

We've launched! Read our announcement.

Support impactful applied Open Source research



Mentor / Sponsor

**Provide explicit opportunities
for the next generation
of open source leadership**



Moving On ...

**Think about how long you've been
in a leadership position
and whether it might be
time to move on**



Drive the Change

**Encourage governance
improvements, increase inclusivity,
help others move up,
be a role model, and
drive the change**



THANK YOU!

Any Questions?



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