

Prosper

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Developing successful partnerships

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This resource provides tips on how to nurture successful partnerships to enable new income. The tips have been shared by a range of business advisors contributing to Prosper, Creative United's business support programme for the arts, museums and libraries.



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Developing successful partnerships

— introduction

Many arts and cultural organisations are reviewing how they might diversify their income streams, reducing dependency on one or two core funders, and reducing the risk on their future resilience from change or cuts in these sources of income.

Most, if not all, of the opportunities that people are exploring involve developing new relationships, often with organisations from industries they've not partnered with before. They can also include shifting their existing relationships with audiences, visitors, participants and commercial customers.

Ideas that organisations have shared with me recently include:

- Introducing 'Pay What You Like' / 'Pay What You Can'
- Hiring office or studio space out to local businesses
- Introducing or expanding the membership scheme
- Introducing corporate membership
- Enhancing or expanding courses / workshops
- Providing shop space for others to use, e.g. retail pop-ups from design, fashion, books, limited edition artworks, etc.
- Reviewing the catering offer
- Selling art work
- Crowdfunding
- Increasing sponsorship
- Reviewing online sales, etc.

This is just a sample of ideas, it's far from an exhaustive list, and none of these are necessarily recommendations.

There are many options, and most arts and cultural organisations have limited time and money, so it's important to experiment and develop ideas over time to identify which will have the most potential. This ensures that should a crisis or sudden change occur you have a range of options that have been tried and tested and know which you want to scale up or develop further.

Think about ...

Which will be most desirable to audiences, funders, commercial customers, etc.?

Which provide the best opportunity for generating income, and more importantly, which will generate the best return on investment once you've taken into account the costs involved in delivering that new idea?

Which will best support the wider purpose, vision or cause of your organisation?

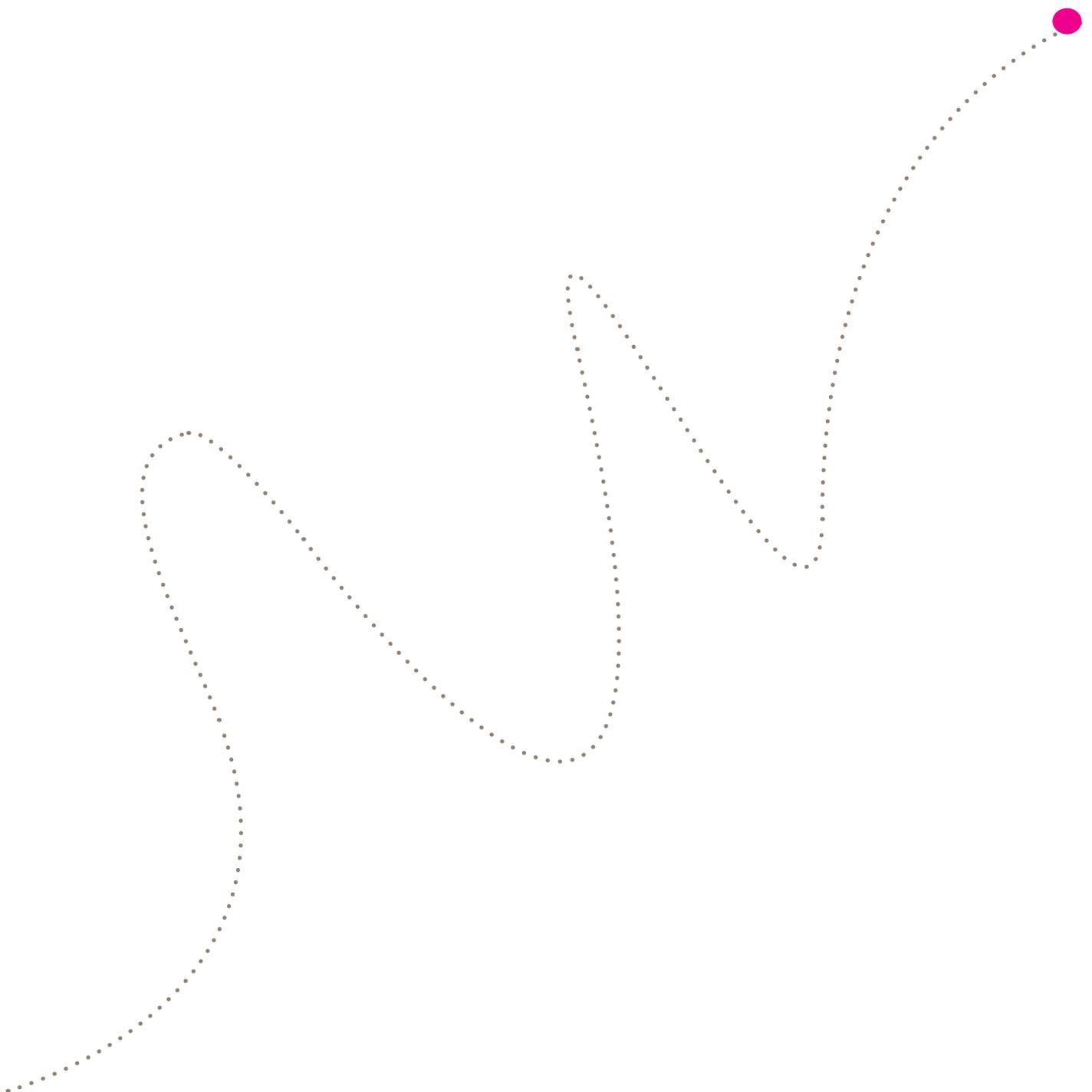
And, which might lead your organisation off-track and generate a confusing message for the people you're seeking to engage?

One of the big questions that you need to explore in taking forward new business model or income generation ideas is:

Is it feasible for you to deliver that idea?

Do you have the skill, resources, time, contacts, IT, etc. to make the idea effective? Why is your organisation the right one to deliver this?

If the answer to some of those questions is no, or yes but only in part, then who might help you bring the vision of your new idea to life?



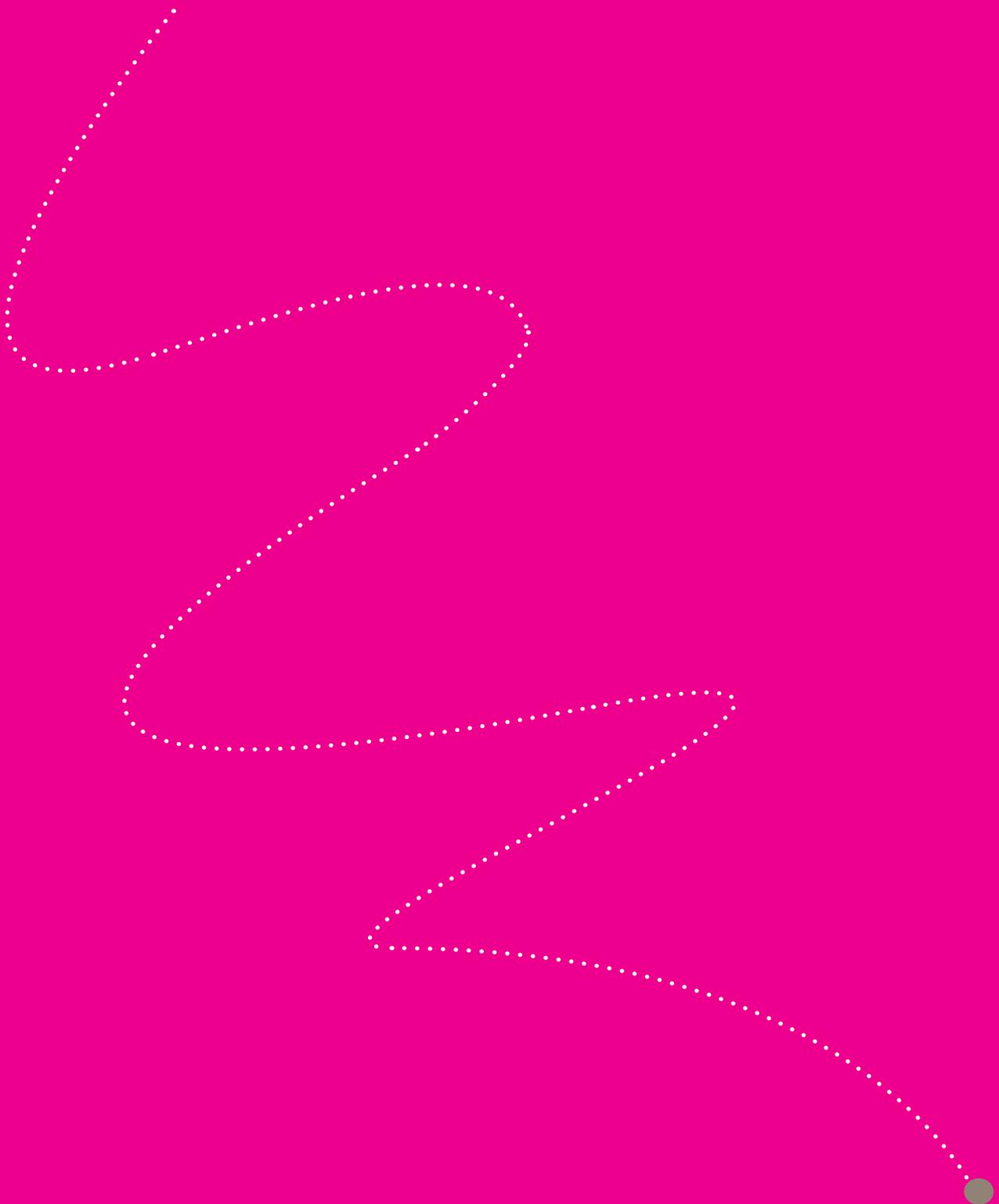
Think about ...

Who might you partner with to bring in missing skills or resources?

Who might help adapt the way your brand is perceived or understood to effectively grab attention in a new area of work?

Who might you partner with to reach new customers? Where do potential customers (audiences, visitors, corporate organisations, local community groups, etc.) spend their time? Who do they trust? Who do they have an existing relationship with?

Identify potential partners and collaborators



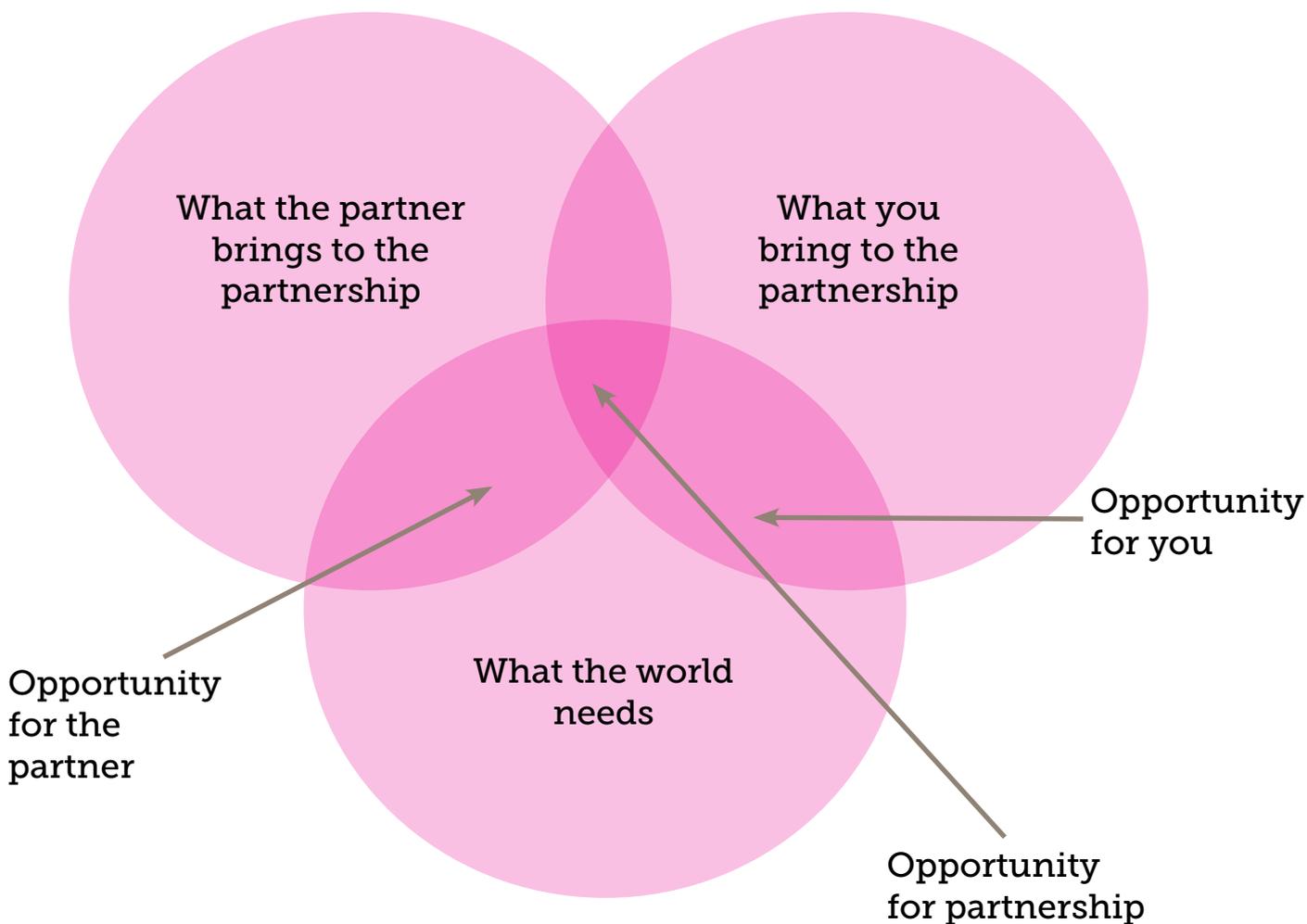
“With your team, map out your key strengths and assets in order that you can clarify where and how you add the most value. Define and refine your points of differentiation and the things that you are uniquely placed to do. Consider who else is operating in this space. This should help to identify potential collaborators and importantly help you articulate how your strengths complement theirs.”

Ellen O’Hara

“If you know your strengths, then you will also know where you are weakest, so it helps to find partners to complement these. Don’t partner with another organisation that is really great at marketing if you are too. Find a partner that is good in your weak area, because that way the project you deliver together will be stronger.”

Penny Nagle

Look for the sweet spot between your strengths, assets and skills and those of potential partners. How does this compare with what audiences, visitors, participants, funders, are interested in? Where might the opportunity lie for collaboration?



“My experience is that all competitors are potential collaborators. Keeping an eye (and possible dialogue) with them will inevitably be fruitful, even if it’s information, or new ways of working. With reduced public funding, it also pays to be aware of who your competitors are because you may have to share backroom services with them if you want to receive public funds — so best to be prepared and know where the fit is ... if necessary draw up a competitive landscape matrix or other infographic to really help visualise where you are.”

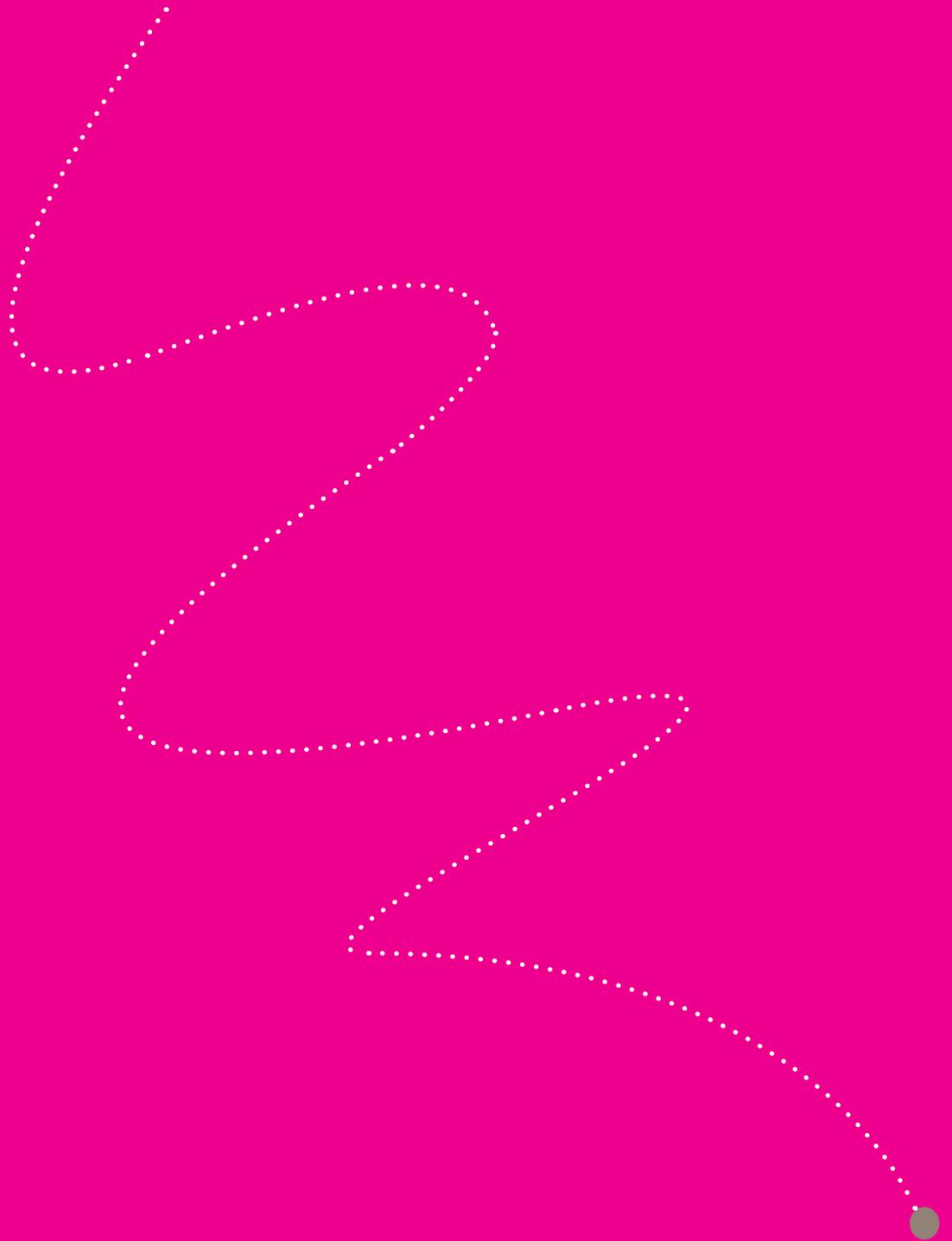
Penny Nagle

See Penny Nagle’s Prosper resource: [Identifying and monetising your digital assets and IP](#) for more on identifying your assets and for an example of a competitive (or collaborator) landscape matrix.

“Be really clear about what value you can bring to the collaboration. Especially, when the collaboration is between a social enterprise and a corporate or for-profit organisation. It’s very important to put yourself in the shoes of the other party and articulate the value they will acquire from the collaboration.”

Olga Astaniotis

Develop a shared ambition

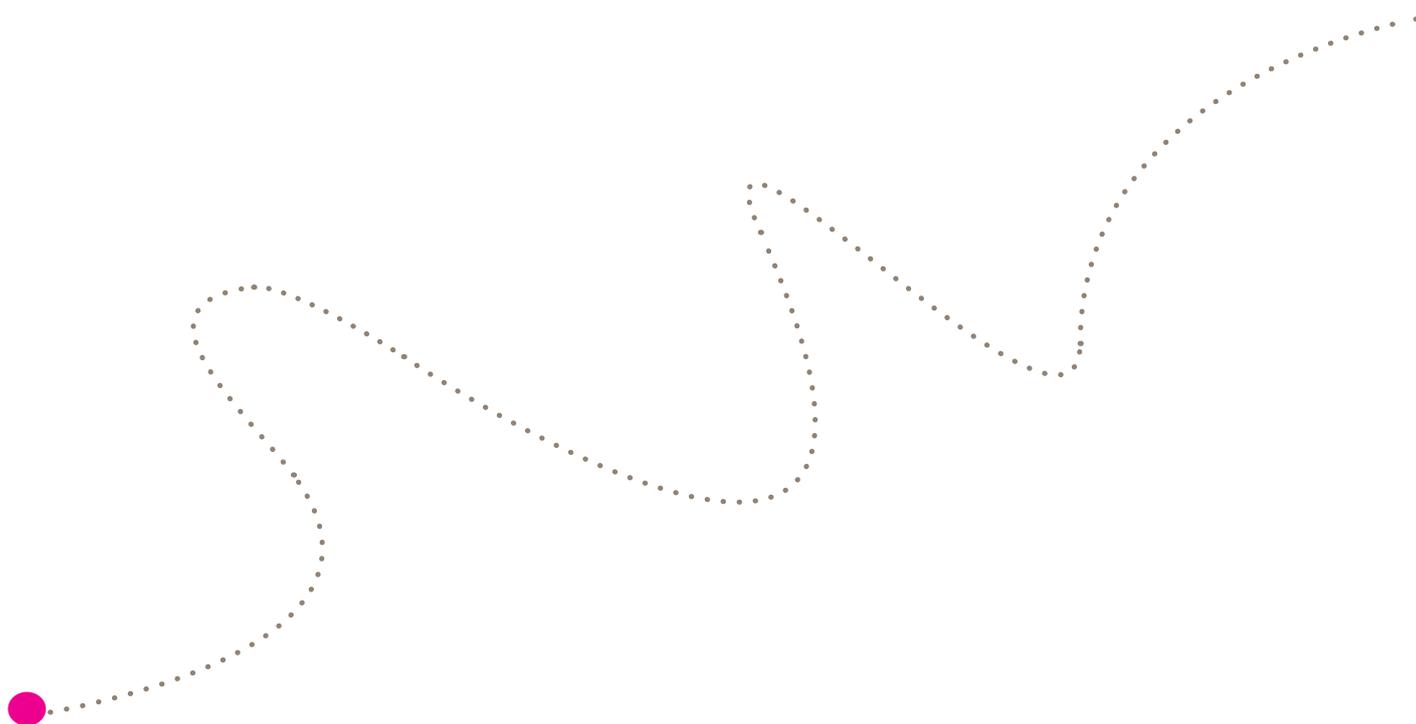


“The key to a successful partnership is ensuring there is shared purpose and vision. What are you trying to achieve? Are you clear in your articulation of that purpose within your own organisation? Ensuring that there is clarity internally is critical before embarking upon an external partnership. Really understanding your goals will help you identify the right people and places who can help you to realise your ambitions. A real partnership will have mutual value and bring benefits to all parties.”

Mairead O'Rourke

List your new income generation ideas. It's unlikely that you will be able to explore them all at the same time so consider which might have the biggest impact on your vision and might deliver most on income.

Then you'll be in a position to think about which partner/s are focused on achieving similar goals.



“Values are fundamental to any business — they define what’s truly important, help shape the culture of an organisation and where to prioritise activity. When researching potential partners take time to consider how their values relate to your own. This helps you to make informed decisions about who you want to work with and why. Aligning your values also helps to establish common ground and makes it much easier to build rapport with a business / organisation.”

Abigail Branagan

Don’t necessarily meet a potential new partner with a detailed plan in place already. Start by discussing the change you want to see in the world, the difference you want to make and explore common ground.

- Do you have a **shared ambition** for the future?
- Where does that ambition **overlap**?
- How might you support one another to have a bigger **impact** for people?

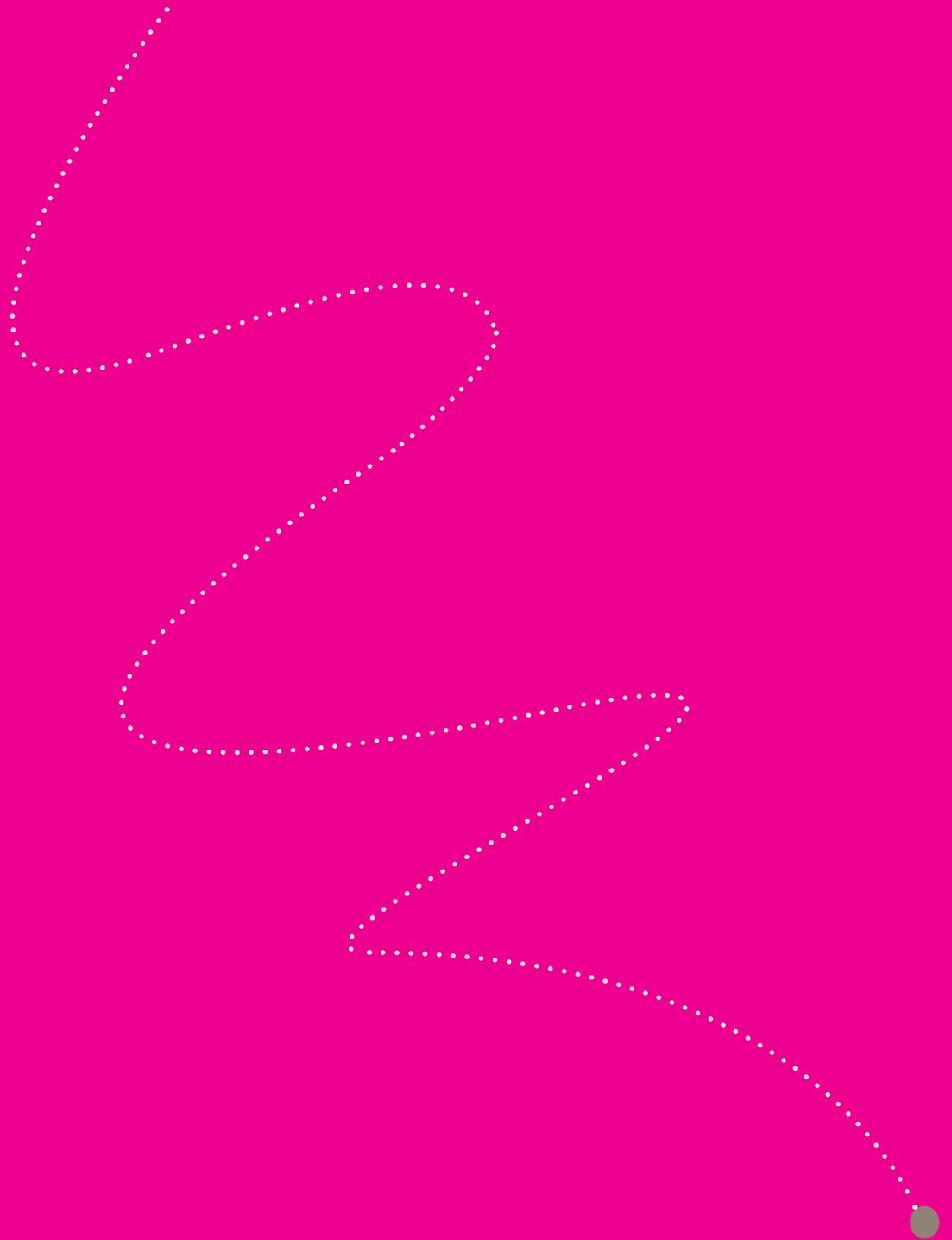
It’s important not to rush this first stage. Exploring future ambition will help you to generate ideas that are motivating and inspiring for both parties to take forward.

Take a long-term view. Make connections and have conversations with a range of interesting potential partners. This might not necessarily lead to new projects and collaborations straight away, but will start to build effective relationships and rapport that could spark something new in the future as situations change and new ideas emerge. Developing a network of potential partners that you know, trust and value, will put you in an ideal position to move quickly on collaborations when opportunities emerge such as new funding streams, or a change in audience expectations, or new digital developments.

Launching a new collaborative project with the aim of quickly accessing new income without taking time to establish trust, build rapport and understanding, and / or without agreeing a shared ambition for success will often lead to conflict, confusion and potential breakdown of the partnership. A quick fix new partnership is often a longer-term time stealer for all concerned.



Build rapport and understanding



“It’s important to understand each other’s operating environment and external pressures. As differing external pressures can often lead to conflict. When starting to develop a partnership ask the difficult questions of your partners early e.g.

- Is there support for this partnership within your organisation?
- What are the key challenges going to be for you in delivering this partnership?
- Where does this project fall within your wider work load and priorities?
- Are there any operating considerations that we need to be aware of?

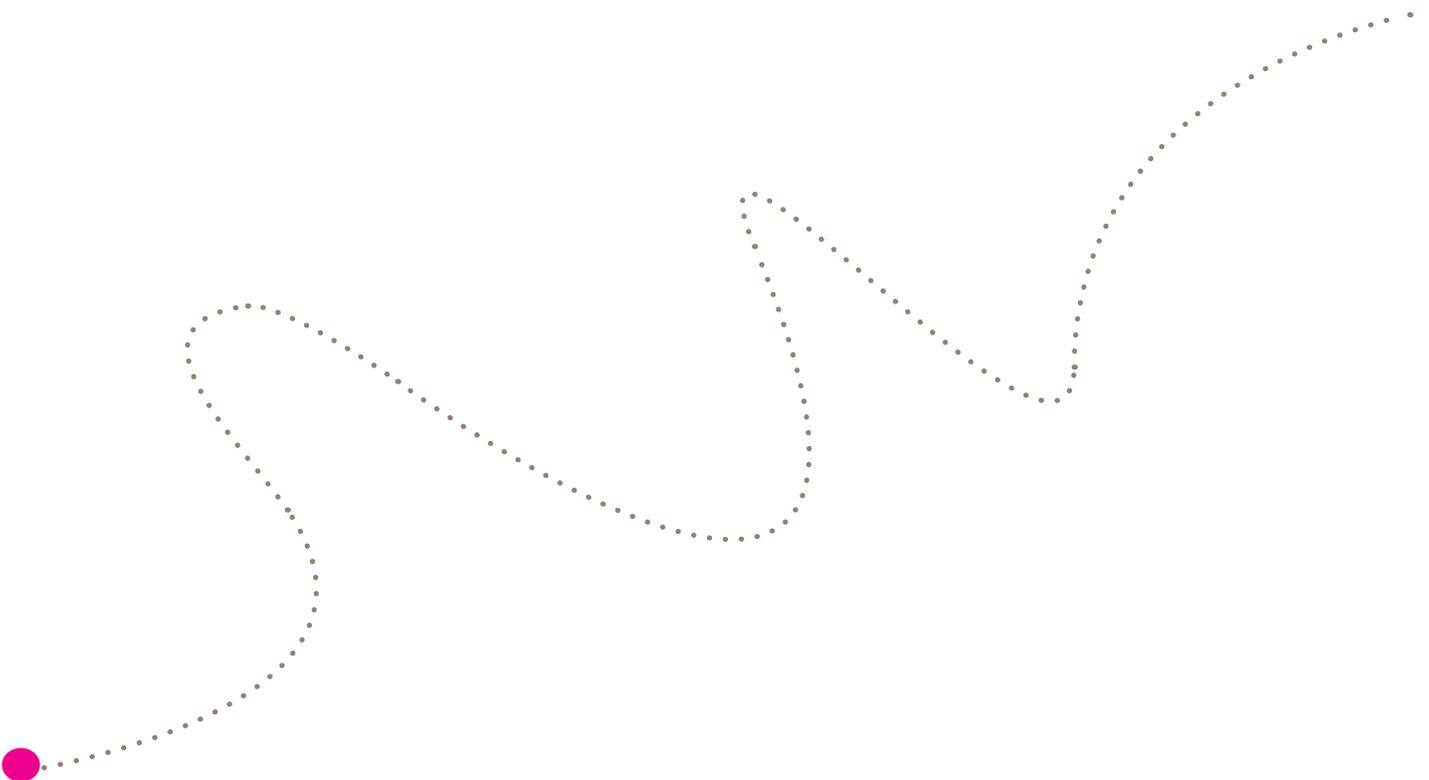
This could range from an accounting firm being busy during January or a company with a lot of staff who have young children and work term time hours and as such are less available over the Summer months.”

Dr Oonagh Murphy

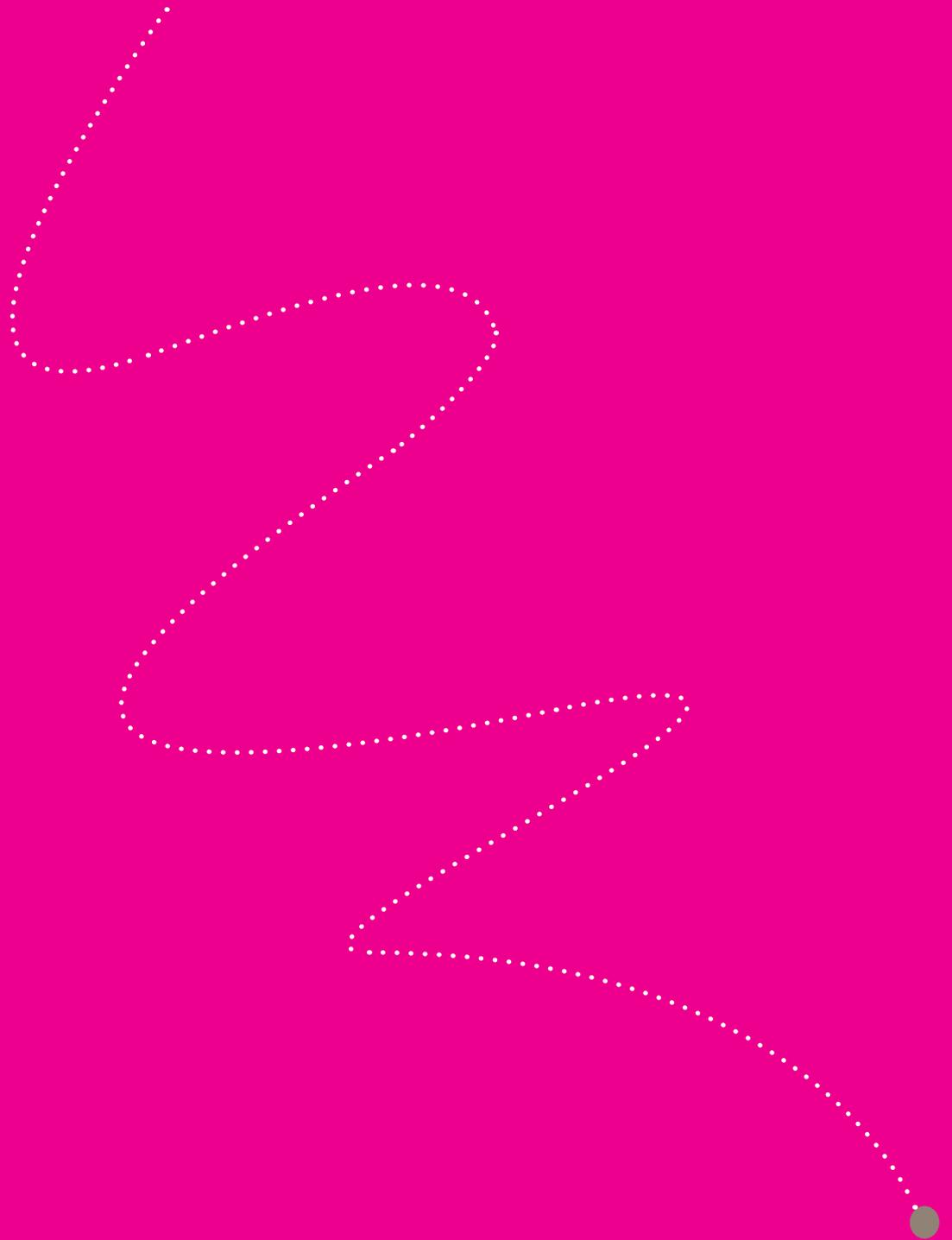
“Avoid viewing partnerships as give and take, instead see them as problems and solutions. Especially true when creating commercial relationships, where creative organisations all too often create a set of benefits in exchange for sponsorship in cash or in kind.

It’s much more effective when you look at the business challenges your potential partner is facing (lack of awareness for a specific demographic, influence of a key stakeholder, differentiation of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy) and then use your product / service as a tool to resolve them. This not only helps both parties spell out the business case, it also deepens the partnership giving it more chance to sustain and grow over the longer term.”

James West



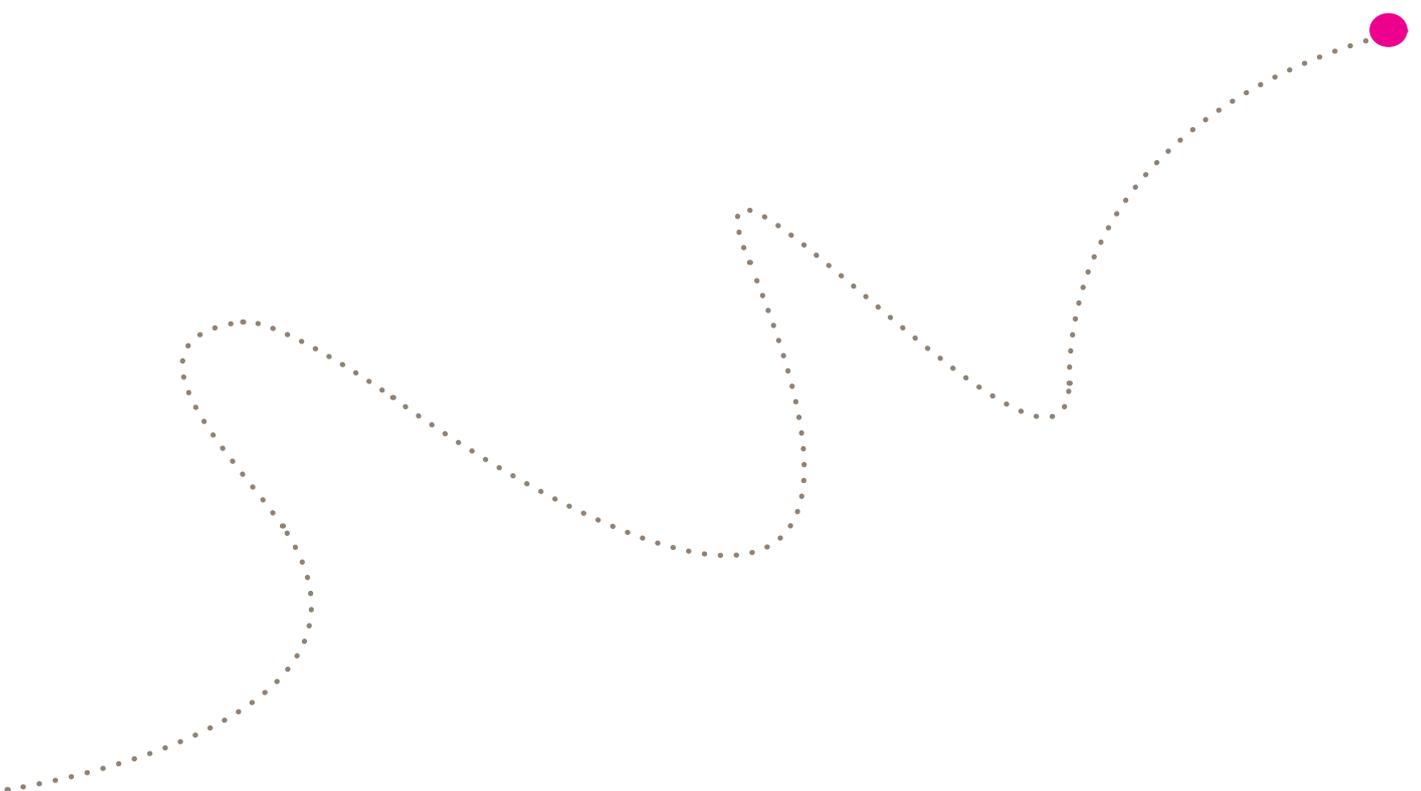
Build relationships with people



“‘People buy from People’ is as true in partnerships as it is with any other area of business. But relying on one person is a precarious position for any partnership. Making sure you connect with other members of the team is crucial: ask about the partner organisation; ask about other staff; get to know their names; create opportunities to meet them; invite more than your named contact to events and meetings. And likewise, involve your wider team in the partnership.

Sometimes more formal marketing is useful — sharing evaluation reports, recording vox pops from people across both organisations or publishing joint papers. Always think beyond the person you’re working with, just in case they move on and the partnership collapses.”

James West



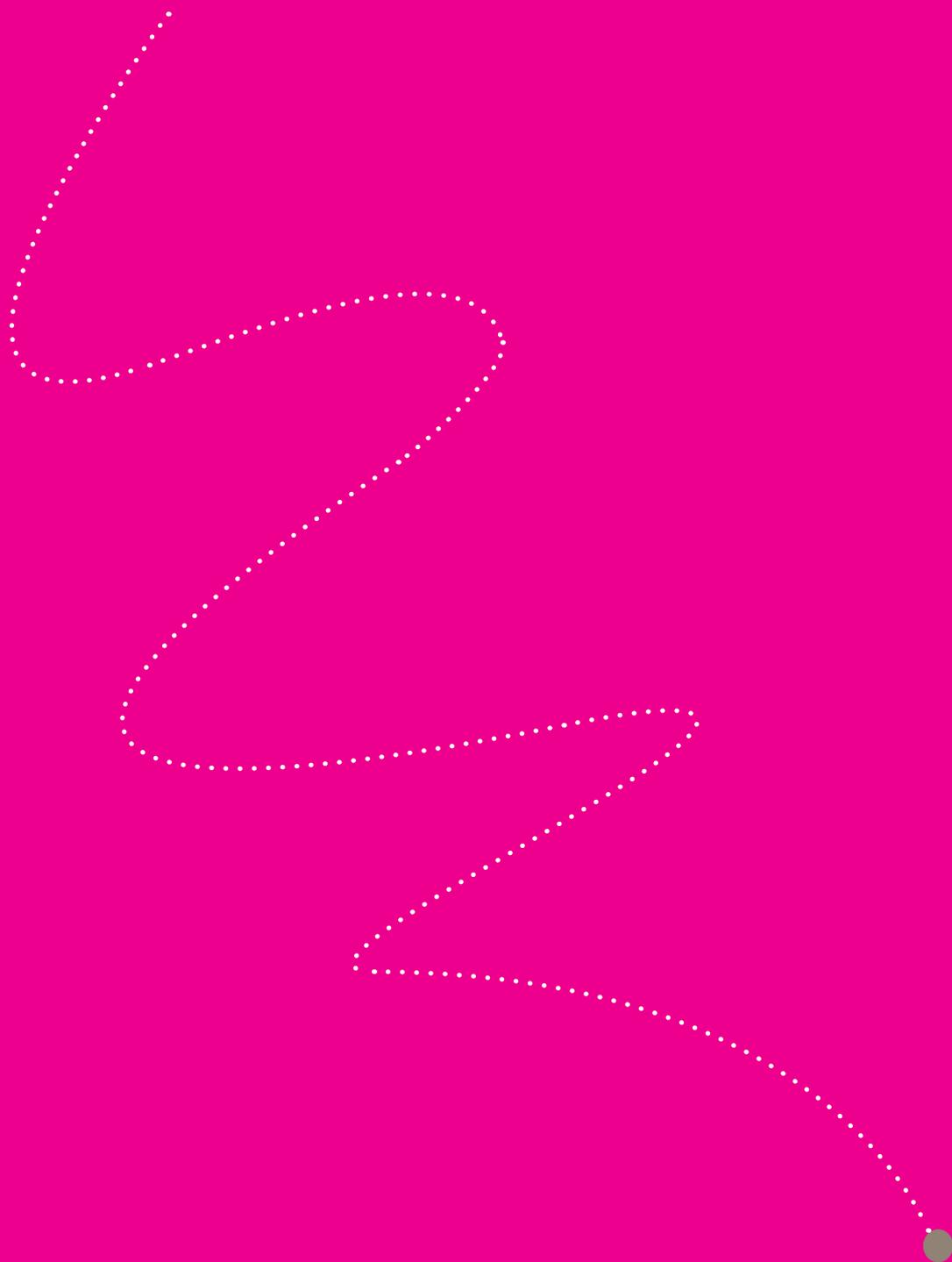
“Research who is the most appropriate person to approach i.e. Managing Director, Development, Commercial, Marketing Director? Do they have any affiliation with your organisation? Are they attenders? If so, do they attend regularly? Have they ever donated? Do any of their family engage with your organisation as participants or attenders?”

Vanessa Rawlings-Jackson

“Consolidate partnerships by involving staff and people from across the organisations involved. For example, building cross-partner relationships not just at senior management level, but at Board level, at volunteer level and at operational levels.”

Olga Astaniotis

Collaborate and
communicate



“Develop light-touch opportunities for each party to participate and deliver value, as well as the more audacious projects. Collaborations last longer when they are not always dependent on large-scale, long-term, resource intensive projects. Focus collaboration efforts on strategic priorities for each partner so that the collaboration has prominence at senior and Board level.”

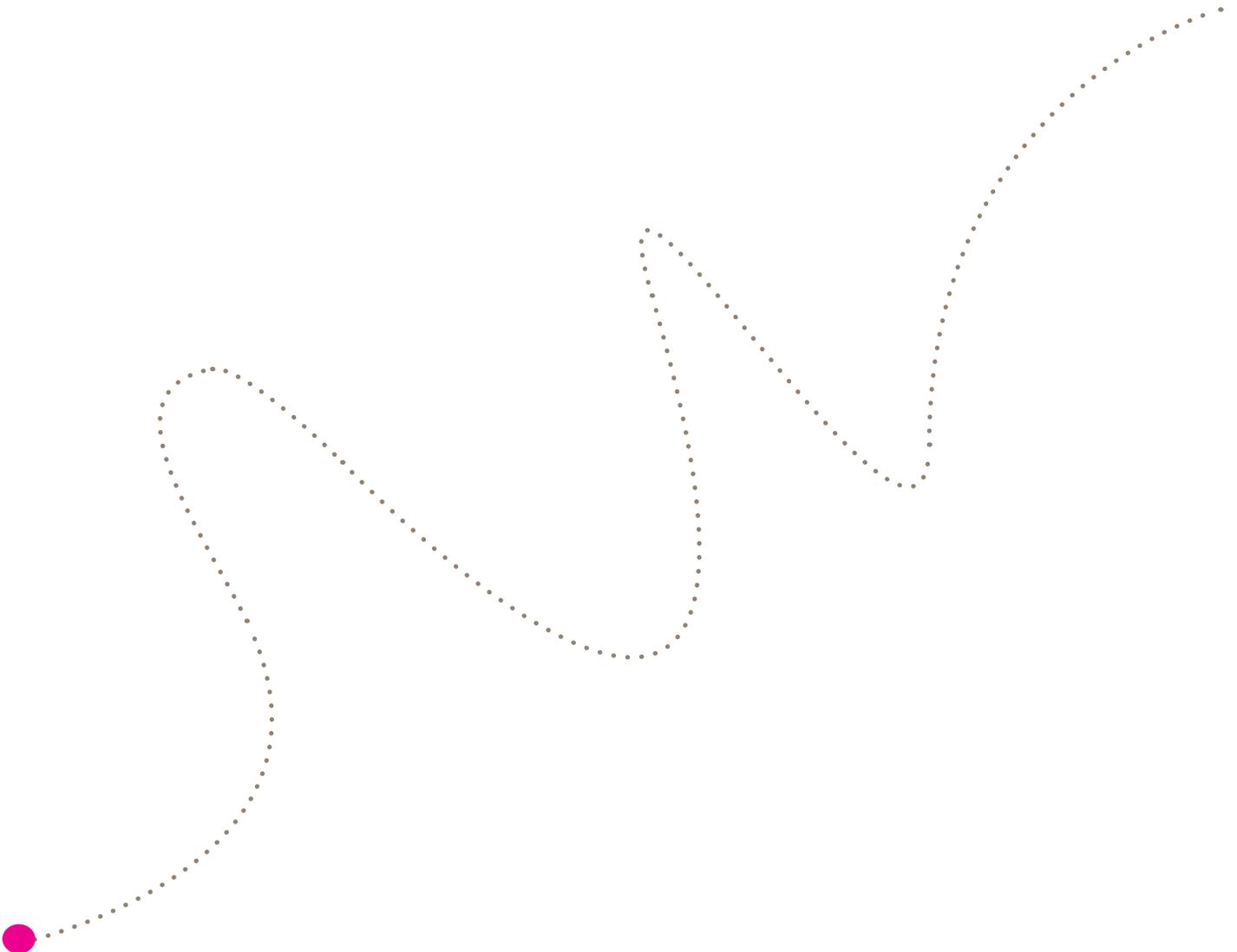
Olga Astaniotis

“Make sure the partnership has a vibrant and meaningful purpose which carries substantial weight for all parties. Each party must be clear what their contribution is, what results are expected and what success will look like for them and for the partnership. Then put in place measures to monitor, measure and communicate progress and successes. Regular communication should be in place from the outset (formal and informal).”

Olga Astaniotis

“Collaboration leads to innovation — collaboration and conversations are where ideas happen, and it’s why Nobel prize winners have come out of teams of people — because you need to collaborate in order to test theories and find wholly new ideas. Try having one of those conversations about something you really want to do, and see what happens. You might not get the answers you expect but another door or window to a new project will open.”

Penny Nagle



Prosper business advisors

— with thanks



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