



THE EMERGING IMPACT OF COLLEGE ATHLETES AS INFLUENCERS

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THE EMERGING IMPACT OF COLLEGE ATHLETES AS INFLUENCERS

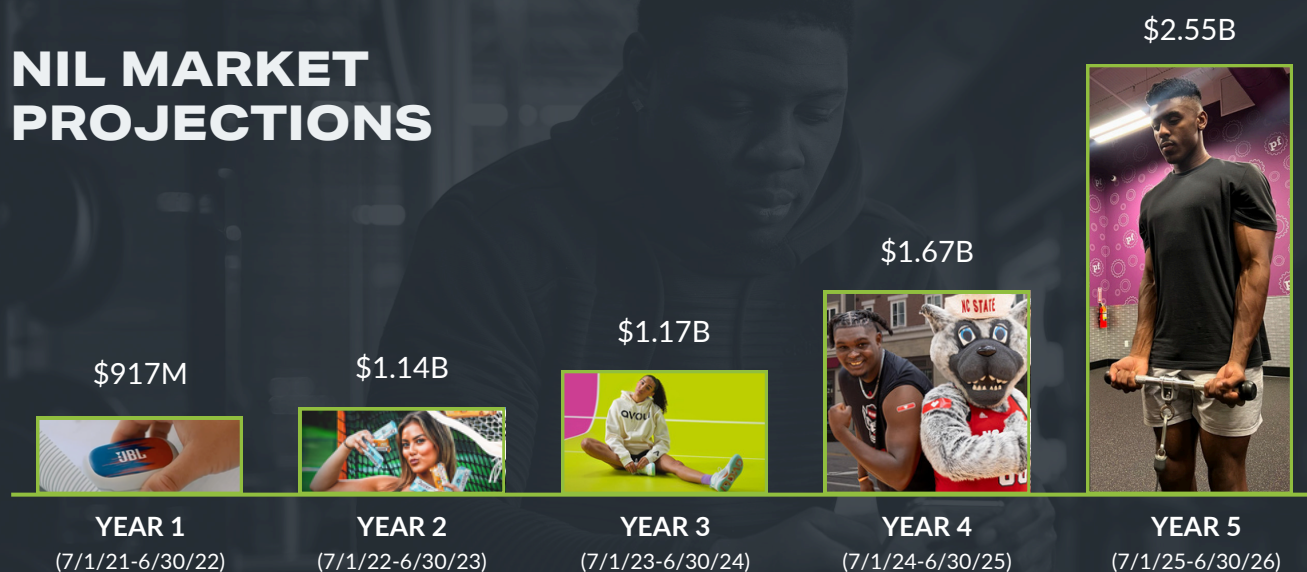
In today's rapidly evolving media landscape, influencer marketing has emerged as a cornerstone of consumer engagement, with global spending [projected to surpass \\$35B by the end of 2024](#). Brands recognize the efficacy of authentic connections fostered by influencers, driving annual growth rates that consistently outperform traditional advertising channels. This momentum is reinforced by data: [89% of marketers affirm that influencer marketing delivers comparable or superior ROI compared to other digital strategies](#). It's clear that influencer-driven campaigns are not just a trend — they're an essential component of modern advertising.

Enter Name, Image & Likeness (NIL). With the NCAA's 2021 policy shift, college athletes have become a dynamic force in the influencer and creator economy. [Within four years, NIL spend is set to exceed 5% of the influencer marketing industry](#), a testament to the potential of these athletes as brand ambassadors. Student-athletes bring a unique blend of relatability, regional loyalty, and passion-driven audiences. Their ability to engage both hyper-targeted, local fan bases and broader national audiences provides brands with unparalleled access to diverse demographics. They're young, fit, and charismatic.

The value of college athletics fandom is immense. College sports fans exhibit strong brand loyalty across all consumer categories, with studies consistently ranking them as the most highly engaged, community-driven, and invested in both the sport and its players. [With 195M college sports fans nationwide](#), this presents an incredible opportunity for brands: tapping into these passionate fandoms means not just driving awareness, but building emotional connections with audiences.

As influencer marketing continues to thrive, college athletes are poised to play a leading role in this evolution, blending the power of NIL with the ever-expanding reach of the creator economy.

NIL MARKET PROJECTIONS



THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF COLLEGE ATHLETE NETWORKS

With more than a quarter-billion followers among a half million student-athletes competing every year, college athletes' audience make up a significant portion of the growing influencer marketing landscape. New freshmen enroll and experienced seniors graduate every year to create a dynamic network of powerful options in your marketing toolkit.

283.6M+

TOTAL FOLLOWERS

65-70%**GEN Z****184.6M+**TOTAL INSTAGRAM
FOLLOWERS**93.3M+**TOTAL TIKTOK
FOLLOWERS**5.7M+**TOTAL X
FOLLOWERS

ATHLETES ON OPENDORSE

150K+CURRENT AND
FORMER ATHLETES**90K+**NCAA
STUDENT-ATHLETES**50K+**NCAA DI
STUDENT-ATHLETES**25K+**NCAA DI POWER 4
STUDENT-ATHLETES

DIVING INTO THE DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding who college athletes reach is key to unlocking the potential of creator advertising. In the early years of NIL, the focus centered on finding athletes who paired well with a brand. Now, the focus is pairing a brand with the athlete's audience. This section breaks down anonymized audience insights for a sample conference, school, and sport. These comparisons illuminate the demographics, interests, and behaviors that make these athletes uniquely positioned to drive engagement for brands.

NCAA DI CONFERENCE

GENDER

MALE 39%

FEMALE 61%



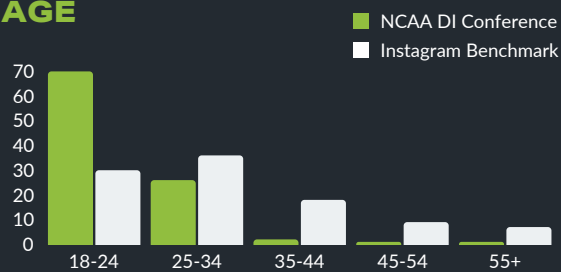
65M+

TOTAL INSTAGRAM
AUDIENCE REACH

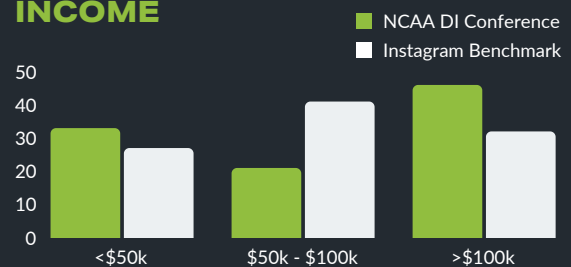
ETHNICITY

WHITE 83% ASIAN 1%
BLACK 13% NATIVE <1%
HISPANIC 2%

AGE



INCOME



NCAA DI SCHOOL

GENDER

MALE 51%

FEMALE 49%



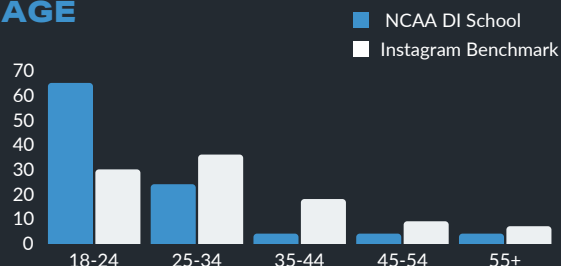
2M+

TOTAL INSTAGRAM
AUDIENCE REACH

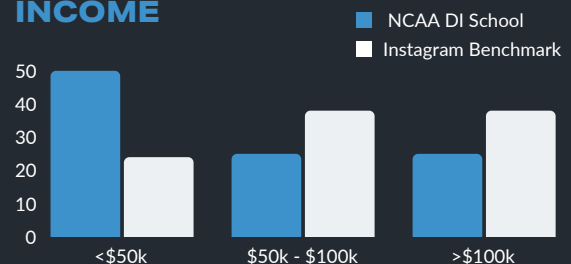
ETHNICITY

WHITE 85% ASIAN 1%
BLACK 11% NATIVE <1%
HISPANIC 2%

AGE



INCOME



NCAA DI MEN'S BASKETBALL PROGRAM

GENDER

MALE 86%

FEMALE 14%



195K+

TOTAL INSTAGRAM
AUDIENCE REACH

ETHNICITY

WHITE 84%

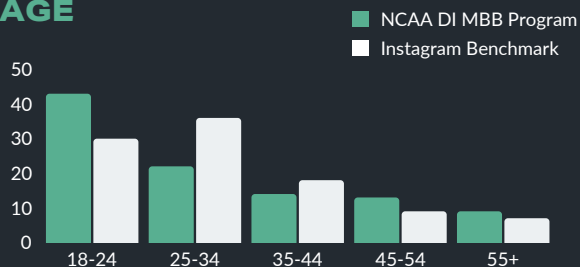
ASIAN <1%

BLACK 14%

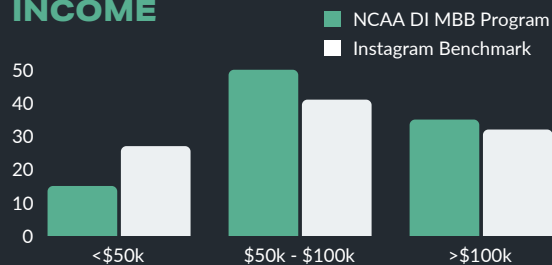
NATIVE <1%

HISPANIC <1%

AGE



INCOME



NCAA DI WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PROGRAM

GENDER

MALE 52%

FEMALE 48%



50K+

TOTAL INSTAGRAM
AUDIENCE REACH

ETHNICITY

WHITE 69%

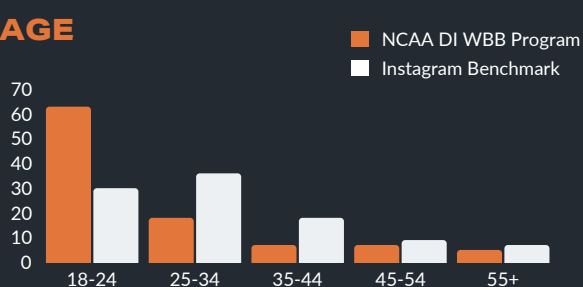
ASIAN <1%

BLACK 30%

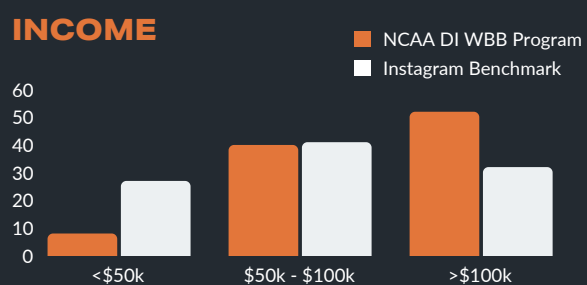
NATIVE <1%

HISPANIC <1%

AGE



INCOME



TOP BRANDS AMONG NCAA DI ATHLETE AUDIENCES



SPALDING



FANATICS



WHOOOP



WILSON

MISSION
BBQMRBEAST
BURGER

TOGETHXR



PRIME



FOOTJOY



PANINI

HOW ATHLETES STACK UP AGAINST TRADITIONAL INFLUENCERS

College athletes bring unparalleled engagement to the influencer marketing space, standing out across mega, macro, mid, micro, and nano tiers. See the comparisons below for their performance against industry benchmarks, showcasing exceptional value they can deliver for advertisers.

OPENDORSE CAMPAIGNS
ON TIKTOK ARE

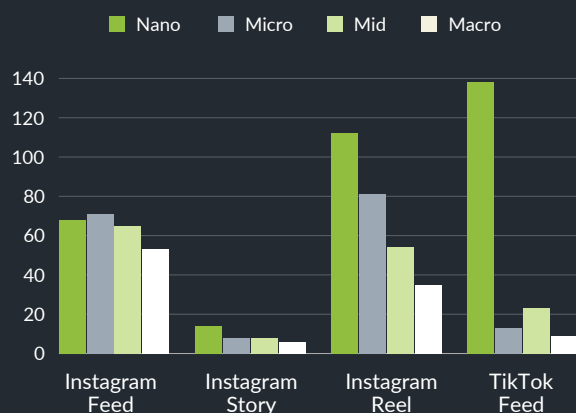
9.3x

HIGHER THAN THE INDUSTRY'S
AVERAGE IMPRESSION RATE

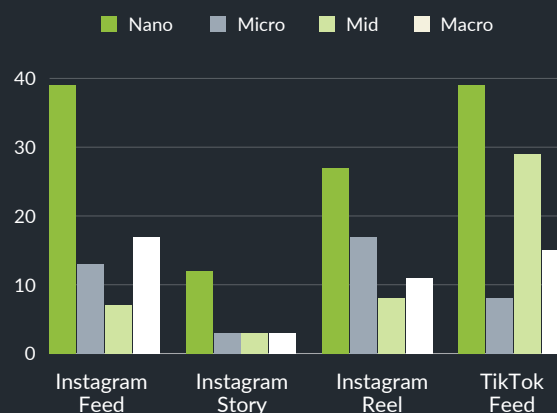
OVERALL METRICS

Platform Placement	AVG. IMPRESSION RATE		AVG. ENGAGEMENT RATE BY REACH	
	Industry Benchmark	Opendorse Campaigns	Industry Benchmark	Opendorse Campaigns
Instagram Feed	25.0%	67.8%	5.0%	13.1%
Instagram Story	5.0%	11.0%	3.0%	3.3%
Instagram Reel	40.0%	94.1%	5.0%	10.2%
TikTok Feed	13.0%	120.8%	4.0%	18.7%

IMPRESSION RATES



ENGAGEMENT RATE BY REACH














*Opendorse organic social performance metrics are averaged from 3.5+ years of NIL campaigns. Industry average metrics are sourced from AdBrazo, DemandSage, Mavrck, Rival IQ, Socialinsider, and Sprout Social.

**Impression rate is calculated as the percentage of a follower base that saw a post, using the formula: $(\text{Total Impressions} \div \text{Follower Count}) \times 100\%$. Impressions reflect the total times content was shown, while reach measures unique users who viewed it.










***Engagement rate is calculated as the percentage of interactions on a post relative to its reach, using the formula: $(\text{Total Engagement} \div \text{Reach}) \times 100\%$. This metric measures how well content resonates with the audience that views it.

BRAND CATEGORY BREAKDOWN

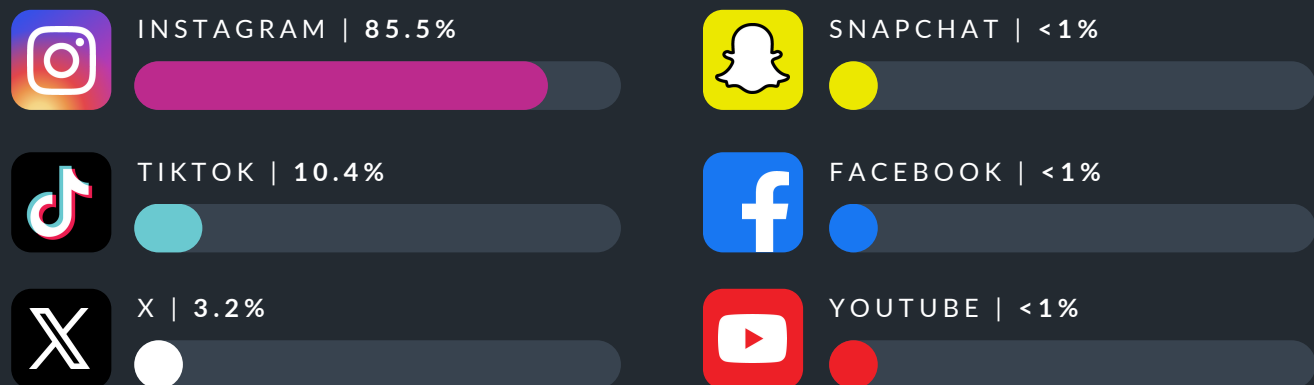
College athletes are shaping brand activations across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, X, and Snapchat. The most talented and committed creators produce long-form content on YouTube. Regardless of the channel, the most common brand categories for influencer campaigns are clear, both activities completed and dollars spent.

	BRAND CATEGORY	% TOTAL NIL ACTIVITIES	% TOTAL NIL SPEND
	TECHNOLOGY	38.3%	13.9%
	RETAIL	10.1%	1.6%
	APPAREL & FOOTWEAR	7.3%	3.6%
	CONSUMER PRODUCTS	6.1%	7.9%
	HEALTH & NUTRITION	6.0%	3.1%
	MEDIA	5.8%	14.4%
	BUSINESS SERVICES	5.2%	2.5%
	CONSUMER SERVICES	4.2%	2.3%
	NON-PROFITS, CHARITIES, ASSOCIATIONS	4.0%	4.0%
	FINANCIAL SERVICES	3.4%	4.2%
	TELECOMMUNICATIONS	1.7%	1.6%

*NIL activity and compensation data is based on anonymized transactions from student-athletes participating in all sports facilitated or disclosed through Opendorse between July 1, 2021, and November 20, 2024.

	BRAND CATEGORY	% TOTAL NIL ACTIVITIES	% TOTAL NIL SPEND
	FOOD & BEVERAGE	1.6%	6.0%
	FOOD & BEVERAGE DISTRIBUTION	1.5%	<1.0%
	AUTO	1.3%	30.3%
	INSURANCE	1.1%	1.7%
	QUICK SERVE RESTAURANTS & DINING	<1.0%	1.3%
	LEISURE & RECREATION	<1.0%	<1.0%
	REAL ESTATE	<1.0%	<1.0%
	CONSTRUCTION & INDUSTRIAL	<1.0%	<1.0%
	HOSPITALITY	<1.0%	<1.0%

NIL ACTIVITIES BY PLATFORM



*NIL activity and compensation data is based on anonymized commercial transactions from student-athletes participating in all sports facilitated or disclosed through Opendorse between July 1, 2021, and November 20, 2024.

SHOWCASING SUCCESS: EA SPORTS AND EPSILON

Highlighting the tangible impact of creator marketing, these case studies delve into how EA and Epsilon leveraged athlete endorsements to drive measurable results. Their experiences underscore the effectiveness of college athletes as influencers in delivering authentic connections and boosting brand engagement.



OBJECTIVE:

EA Sports teamed up with student-athletes of all sports backgrounds to promote the release of *College Football 25* and enhance brand visibility.

15.1%

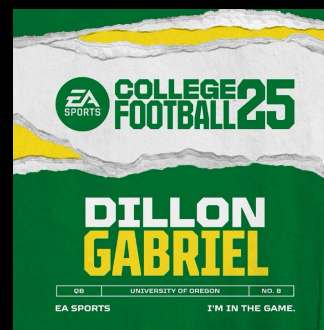
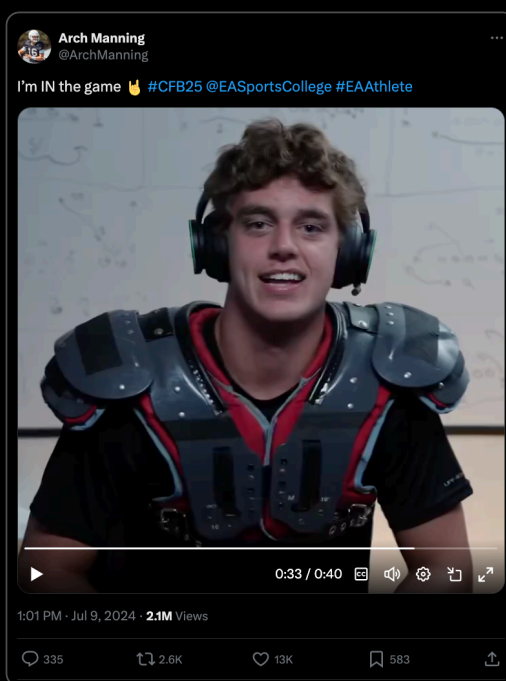
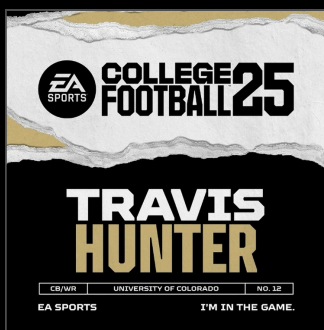
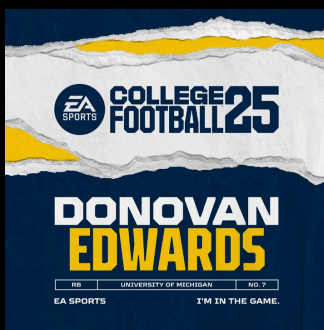
AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT
RATE (BY REACH)

167

TOTAL
ATHLETES

73.3M

IG & X IMPRESSIONS
OVER A 45-DAY PERIOD



Epsilon

OBJECTIVE:

Spotlight Epsilon's commitment to fostering female empowerment and innovation in the workplace by extending a partnership opportunity to all participants in the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament.

22.9M

TOTAL
POTENTIAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS FOR
'EPSILON x NIL x
MARCH MADNESS'
MENTIONS

51%

AVG. IMPRESSION RATE

94%

POSITIVE MEDIA SENTIMENT

12.7%

AVG. ENGAGEMENT RATE
(BY REACH)

1.2M

INSTAGRAM IMPRESSIONS

**68/68**

STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM ALL 68 NCAA TOURNAMENT
TEAMS RECEIVED A DEAL FROM THE WORK TOGETHER
TO WIN TOGETHER CAMPAIGN

UNLOCK THE POWER OF COLLEGE ATHLETES WITH OPENDORSE

Opendorse empowers brands to seamlessly connect with college athletes and harness the unmatched power of influencer marketing. From identifying the right talent to executing impactful campaigns, our platform and team of experts streamline every step of the process. Ready to take your influencer marketing to the next level? Opendorse is here to bring your vision to life.

HOW IT WORKS

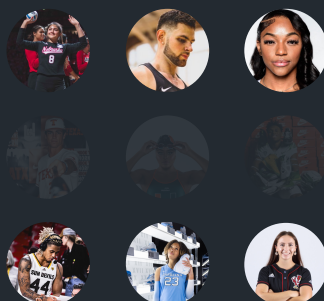
1

Select your target audience



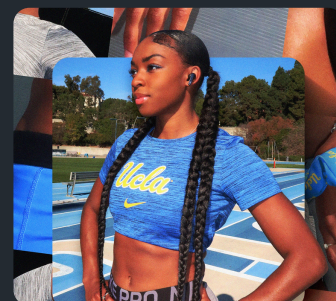
2

We identify athletes to reach your audience



3

We work with athletes to generate branded content



GET STARTED

With Opendorse, partnering with athletes has never been easier. We provide the tools and expertise to streamline the process, helping you connect with the right athletes to elevate your brand. From planning to execution, we make it turn-key.

Whether you're looking to drive awareness, boost sales, or build authentic connections with your audience, Opendorse is here to help every step of the way. Let's unlock the potential of athlete partnerships for your brand.

Ready to get started? Contact our team lead media.sales@opendorse.com for a personalized consultation to see how we can help you achieve your marketing and advertising goals.

UNLOCKING THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE ATHLETES IN MARKETING

As the American collegiate landscape continues to evolve at breakneck pace, the role of college athletes in the influencer economy has grown beyond expectations. Here are the four key takeaways driving the transformation of athlete marketing:



NIL MARKET GROWTH IS ACCELERATING

With annual ad spending projected to nearly double next year, collegiate athletes are positioned as some of the most impactful influencers in marketing today. Their unique connection to audiences ensures continued momentum and scalability.



FROM ATHLETE TO AUDIENCE-FIRST STRATEGY

Early campaigns focused on athlete-brand alignment. Today, the priority has shifted to audience alignment. Opendorse Data empowers brands to connect with athletes whose audiences reflect their target demographics, driving deeper engagement and ROI.



OPENDORSE SETS THE STANDARD

Opendorse Campaigns consistently outperform industry benchmarks across all major platforms, demonstrating the unmatched value of athlete-driven campaigns. From Instagram Stories to TikTok feeds, athletes deliver content that outshines traditional influencer metrics.



CASE STUDY SUCCESS STORIES

Campaigns by EA Sports and Epsilon highlight the immense potential of partnering with collegiate athletes. These collaborations delivered record-breaking impressions, engagement, and sentiment, proving the power of athlete influencers in driving brand growth.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

As college athletes continue to redefine the influencer economy, brands have an unparalleled opportunity to tap into this vibrant and evolving market. By harnessing their reach, relatability, and regional appeal, the possibilities for transformative engagement are endless.