



PRESENTED BY 2025-2026 COMPETITION PARTNER:



Executive Summary

Play It Forward is more than a campaign; it's a promise. Inspired by the idea of "paying it forward," it reframes football as a way to give back, not through money, but through movement, mentorship, and opportunity.

While the NFL is often defined by star players and spectacle, its impact on youth wellness remains largely unseen, especially among parents and global audiences. At a time when screen time is rising, structure is fading, and families are seeking safer, more inclusive ways for their children to thrive, **Play It Forward positions football as a force for good.**

By spotlighting real stories, community-led initiatives, and universal values - like teamwork, inclusion, and personal growth - the NFL moves beyond the game, transforming football into something you don't just watch but actively pass on to the next generation.

Ultimately, Play It Forward succeeds by showing up as real — not polished or performative. Parents aren't looking for another branded promise; they're looking for proof that the NFL understands their children, their concerns, and their communities.

This campaign is grounded in authenticity: real players giving back, real kids building confidence, and real neighborhoods coming together through the game. By centering girls, nontraditional athletes, and diverse cultures, **Play It Forward reflects the future of football; not just who plays it, but who it's for.**

When football becomes a vehicle for belonging, growth and opportunity, the NFL evolves from something you simply watch on Sundays into something families across the U.S. and beyond trust to help shape the next generation.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	01
Brand Analysis	02
Research	03
Target Audience	04
Strategy	05
Manifesto	06
Creative Strategy	07
Phase 1	08
Phase 2	09
Phase 3	10
Media Flowchart & Budget	11
Evaluation	12

Campaign Objectives

Promote Youth Wellness Through Football

Position football as a tool for movement, mentorship, and personal growth, encouraging kids to stay active and develop confidence.

Showcase Authentic Impact

Demonstrate the NFL's tangible, trustworthy contribution to communities.

Champion Inclusion and the Future of Football

Reflect the evolving, inclusive, and globally-engaged vision of who football is for.

Research

Our research shows that while football is widely recognized, the NFL isn't strongly associated with youth health and wellness. Awareness of its initiatives is low, and perceptions are mixed. This creates an opportunity to reposition football as a driver of youth wellness, connection, and community impact.

Internal Insights

- **61.8%** of respondents were **unaware of NFL youth programs** (PLAY 60, NFL FLAG, etc.)
- **63.6%** agree the NFL's involvement in youth and community initiatives is **positive**, but **many remain neutral** on whether the league truly prioritizes youth wellness
- **61.4%** of parents reported their child has **little to no knowledge of the NFL**
- Community events, school partnerships, and social media ranked as the **most engaging campaign formats**, while influencer and statistic-heavy messaging were less effective

External Insights

- Awareness of NFL youth initiatives is **extremely limited**; top-of-mind associations are players or pop culture rather than community impact
- Screen time and technology were consistently identified as major contributors to **declining youth physical, mental, and social health**
- The NFL is sometimes associated with injury risk (e.g., concussions), reinforcing the need to **emphasize safety and accessibility** through alternatives like flag football
- **Authenticity is critical**, as parents and participants respond more to real stories, community involvement, and inclusivity than to overly branded or promotional messaging
- Inclusive, accessible programming (girls' sports, beginner-friendly formats, global/local adaptations) **increases perceived relevance** and trust

The NFL's challenge is not a lack of impact, but a lack of visibility and emotional connection. While audiences are open to the league playing a positive role in youth development, its efforts are often unseen or perceived as secondary to the game itself. To resonate, the NFL must shift from telling to showing, embedding itself authentically within communities and everyday youth experiences.

Youth wellness today is shaped by declining physical activity, increased screen time, and a growing need for accessible, inclusive community spaces. Parents are not looking for another brand message, they are looking for **real solutions**. By positioning football as a tool for movement, mentorship, and belonging, the NFL has the opportunity to move beyond perception and **become a meaningful part of youth development in everyday life, at a global scale**.


100+
Survey Responses


12
Hours of Social Listening


80+
Sources


10
Interviews

2

Brand Analysis

Strengths

Established Brand & Loyalty: Long-standing credibility with a dedicated national fan base that spans generations, reinforced by consistent engagement, team loyalty, and deeply rooted emotional connections to franchises.

Youth Wellness Foundation: Strong initiatives promoting community, teamwork, and social responsibility already in place, supported by programs that encourage youth participation, character development, and positive local impact.

Cultural Tradition: Football remains a core American family tradition that is recognized globally, serving as a shared ritual that brings together multiple generations through game-day experiences and longstanding seasonal habits.

Mass Media Presence: High visibility, production quality, and consistent cultural relevance across platforms, amplified by prime-time broadcasts, digital expansion, and integration into everyday entertainment and conversation.

Weaknesses

Aging Fan Demographic: Audience appeal skews toward older male viewers, with a core base that has remained loyal over time but signals a slower rate of adoption among younger and more diverse emerging audiences.

Limited Global Reach: Overshadowed internationally by other sports, particularly soccer and basketball, resulting in lower visibility and cultural relevance in key global markets outside of North America.

Media Dependence: Heavy reliance on TV and streaming revenue as primary drivers of growth, with the league's financial model closely tied to broadcast rights, advertising partnerships, and live game viewership.

Youth Viewing Shift: Younger audiences increasingly prefer short-form, highlight-driven content, indicating a shift away from full-game consumption toward faster, more digestible formats across social and digital platforms.

Opportunities

Unified Youth Campaign: Align all youth wellness initiatives under one cohesive platform, creating a clear and recognizable ecosystem that strengthens brand consistency while making programs easier for families to understand, access, and engage with.

Community Engagement: Increase participation in team sports, flag football, and local programs by investing in grassroots initiatives and partnerships that make the sport more accessible, inclusive, and embedded within everyday community life.

Digital Interaction: Leverage social media for authentic, two-way engagement by creating interactive, shareable content that encourages participation, conversation, and a stronger sense of connection between the league and younger audiences.

Female Representation: Highlight women athletes, coaches, and promote girls' flag football through increased visibility, storytelling, and investment, positioning the NFL as a more inclusive space that supports the growth of women's participation in the sport.

Threats

Low-Contact Competitors: Rising sports with lower cost and injury risk, such as soccer, basketball, and non-contact alternatives, are becoming more appealing to parents and younger athletes who prioritize safety, accessibility, and long-term participation.

College Football Overlap: Scheduling conflicts between college football and the NFL may reduce overall viewership, as fans are forced to choose between overlapping games, diluting attention and splitting loyalty across levels of the sport.

Declining Youth Interest in Sports: Kids are increasingly less engaged in traditional sports due to the rise of smartphones, gaming, and digital entertainment, shifting their attention toward screen-based activities and reducing time spent on physical, organized play.

78% respondents
consider themselves NFL fans.

1 in 4 kids get
enough daily physical activity.

Target Audience

Our target audience is defined by the belief that football is more than a game. It is a platform for growth, connection, and long-term impact. Across parents, teens, girls in flag football, international youth, and community mentors, they share a common expectation. They want football to build character, confidence, safety, and opportunity for the next generation.



Look for these personas throughout the campaign!

Protector Parent



Values:

Family connection, safe play, positive mentorship, character development

What drives them:

Driven by safety and character development

What they want:

Clear proof of safety, mentorship, inclusion, and emotional well-being through sport.

"When my child plays, they're not just staying active — they're learning values that carry forward."

Eric 36

Global Dreamer

Values:

Belonging, global connection, pride, and opportunity

What drives them:

Driven by belonging to something bigger

What they want:

Representation, global pathways, and stories that position football as an international future sport.

"I play here, but I'm part of something everywhere."

Juan 16



Confidence Seeker



Values:

Self-expression, resilience, mentorship, authenticity

What drives them:

Driven by identity and self-worth

What they want:

Relatable storytelling, mental health transparency, and role models who show vulnerability and growth.

"Football helps me become who I'm still figuring out."

Angel 9

Game Changer Girl

Values:

Representation, empowerment, equality, leadership

What drives them:

Driven by representation and empowerment

What they want:

Women-led programs, female coaches and ambassadors, content and merch designed for her.



"When I play, I make it easier for the girl after me."

Lucia 11

Community Builder



Values:

Leadership, mentorship, safe spaces, and long-term impact

What drives them:

Driven by mentorship and long-term impact

What they want:

Recognition, unified branding, and tools to amplify their programs and recruit more youth.

"I don't just coach kids — I shape what comes next."

Matt 18

Strategy

In simpler terms, the NFL's youth impact isn't the issue—visibility and emotional connection are. People already believe sports build character and community, but they don't clearly see that impact tied to the NFL. As a result, they respond best to authentic storytelling that shows football shaping better people, not just players. "Play It Forward" bridges this gap by framing every moment of play as part of a larger ripple effect across families and communities.

Pass It On

Sept 2026- Dec 2026

Make It Memorable

May 2026-August 2026

Reframe the Game

Jan 2026-April 2026

Shift the perception of the NFL from an aggressive contact sport to an inclusive, positive, and character-building experience that supports youth development beyond the field. Reposition football as a platform that **fosters confidence, teamwork, and personal growth.**

Emphasize the **global movement of football** and its impact on children growing into well-rounded adults. Highlight how the sport builds belonging, teaches life skills, and creates a lasting foundation for **growth beyond the game.**

Increase unaided consideration of the NFL by strengthening its presence through culturally relevant moments, consistent messaging, and emotionally resonant storytelling. **Ensure football remains top-of-mind** by reinforcing its connection to entertainment, community, and everyday life.

Drive **deeper recall** by connecting repeated exposure with meaningful narratives audiences can recognize and remember. Through this phase, **transform awareness into memory** by reinforcing football's role in shaping identity, relationships, and shared experiences, building **strong mental associations with youth development and community.**

Build brand love by clearly demonstrating how the NFL contributes to real-world impact **beyond the field** into communities, families, and future generations, while supporting personal development, mentorship, and opportunities like scholarships and community engagement.

Strengthen emotional connection by highlighting how individuals, families, and communities carry forward the values learned through football, **positioning the NFL as something people actively take part in.**

Establish the NFL as a brand that supports growth, connection, and purpose, building stronger bonds with audiences and encouraging them to "play it forward" in their own lives.

Manifesto

Football is more than a game. It's a feeling that stays with you.

It's the confidence after your first play, the encouragement from a coach, and the moment you realize you belong. These moments don't end when the game does; they carry forward. Across families and communities, that impact is already happening. Kids are building confidence, teams are creating connection, and mentors are shaping what comes next. But while people believe in what sports can do, they don't always see that impact connected to the NFL. That's the gap - not a lack of impact, but a lack of emotional connection.

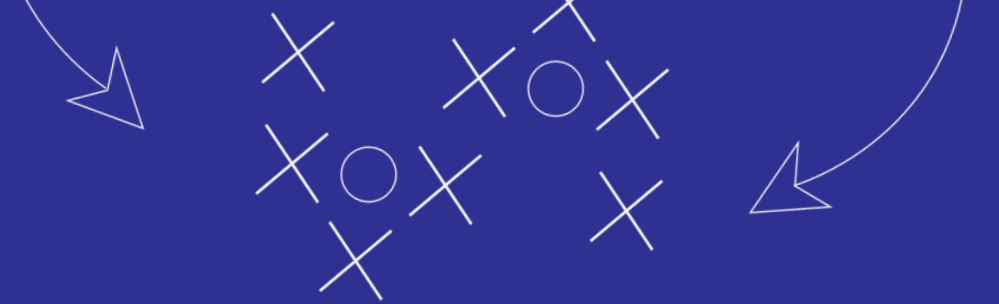
When kids play, it's never just about the game. It's about how it makes them feel and who they become because of it. A moment becomes confidence, a team becomes identity, and a game becomes something bigger. Because football isn't just something you play or watch. It's something you pass on: passed across communities, passed down through generations, and passed through local and international borders.

This is how connection grows.

This is how impact carries forward.



Creative Concept



Big Idea & Campaign Tagline: “Play It Forward”

Football is never just a game. Every pass, lesson, and moment of teamwork **creates a ripple effect**, shaping confidence, character, belonging, and future leadership. **“Play It Forward” positions every youth football experience as the beginning of something bigger:** stronger families, stronger communities, and a global movement built on shared values.

The campaign reframes the National Football League from a contact sport brand to a **youth development leader**.

Logo & Icons

At the center of this framework is the Play It Forward logo, which visually represents **motion, continuity, and impact**. The curved arrows surrounding the mark signal forward momentum and the passing of values from one generation to the next, reinforcing the campaign's core idea: what happens in football doesn't stop at the game, it **carries forward into confidence, character, and community**.

Supporting the logo is a playbook-inspired visual system, built from X's, O's, and directional arrows. These elements, traditionally used to map strategy on the field, are reimaged as symbols of **growth, connection, and progression**. X's and O's represent players, relationships, and moments of interaction, while arrows illustrate the ripple effect of those moments—how one experience leads to another, extending **impact beyond the field** and into everyday life.

This system is carried through patterns and iconography, creating a consistent and recognizable visual language across all touchpoints. Icons reflect key audience personas and moments of impact, players, coaches, families, and communities, bringing the campaign to life in a way that feels human, inclusive, and grounded in real experiences. These elements ensure flexibility across executions, from digital and social to grassroots activations, while maintaining a unified identity.



Brand Fit

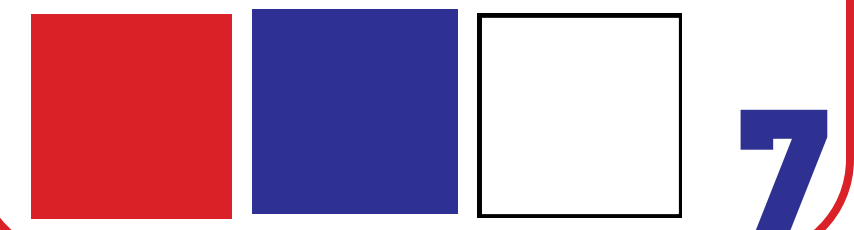
The NFL already invests in youth development. **“Play It Forward” makes that investment visible**, aligning with:

- Youth participation growth (NFL FLAG)
- Health & wellness (PLAY 60)
- Character education (Character Playbook)
- Global expansion of football

This campaign **transforms scattered initiatives into one emotionally cohesive movement**.

Tone & Palette

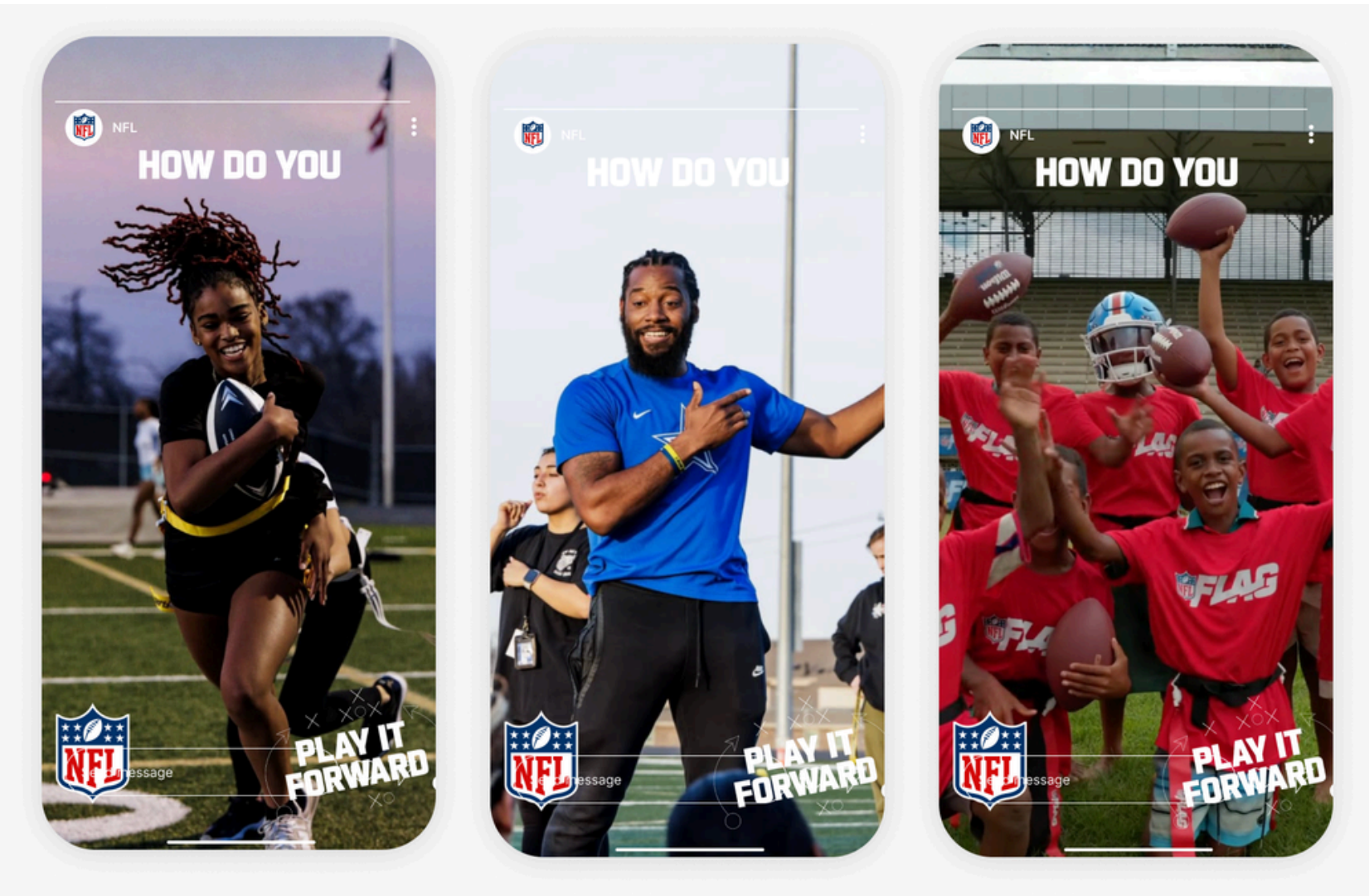
Authentic, hopeful, community-driven, emotionally resonant, and NOT corporate.



Phase One *Reframe the Game*

In Phase One, we shift perception by reframing football as more than a physical sport—it becomes a platform for connection, growth, and inclusion. “Play It Forward” introduces football as a global, values-driven experience that brings people together across cultures and communities. This phase focuses on emotional storytelling that highlights character development, mentorship, and belonging, helping audiences see football not for its contact, but for its impact on shaping better individuals and stronger communities.

Social Media



TV / Streaming

“How do you #PlayItForward?” Segment with Olympians



OOH

International Transit Station Placements



Phase Two *Make it Memorable*

In Phase Two, we build on awareness by reinforcing “Play It Forward” through consistent, engaging touchpoints that keep the NFL top-of-mind. This phase focuses on making the message memorable through entertainment, cultural relevance, and repeated exposure across platforms. By integrating influencers, streaming content, and interactive experiences, we move audiences from passive awareness to active consideration, encouraging families to see NFL youth programs as accessible, relevant, and worth participating in.

Influencers

Fernando Mendoza’s appearance on the Kelce Podcast brings youth football into mainstream sports conversation, strengthening authenticity within football culture.



Katie Feeney and Nikki Glaser’s “WAG Watch” segment engages girls and women, expanding football culture beyond traditional male audiences.



Success will be measured primarily by participation and league registrations. Secondary KPIs include lift in unaided consideration, engagement rate across digital platforms, event attendance, and retargeting conversion rates.



Partnerships & Activation

Madden

The Madden Flag Football Specialty Game embeds youth participation directly into the gaming ecosystem, building mental availability among younger audiences.



Toyota x NFL

Toyota’s “Let’s Go Places x Play It Forward” partnership positions youth football as a family decision, showing up at tournaments and reinforcing access and support.



School Programs

School and club programs convert awareness into action through clinics, tournaments, and local sign-up opportunities.

Engagement Drivers

The #PlayItForward digital challenge encourages families to share moments of mentorship and growth, reinforcing campaign values. User-generated skill-sharing content builds authenticity and community pride. Sequential retargeting and post-event follow-up communications reduce drop-off and drive league registration.



Phase Three *Pass it On*

In Phase Three, we shift from awareness to action by turning emotional connection into participation. “Play It Forward” becomes something people actively live out—through community involvement, shared experiences, and personal storytelling. This phase focuses on building lasting relationships by empowering individuals, families, and communities to carry forward the values of football in their own lives. By creating opportunities for engagement, recognition, and belonging, the NFL becomes more than a league—it becomes a movement people feel proud to be part of and motivated to pass on to others.

Play it Forward Screening

To foster relational bonding and cultural pride, we will organize community screenings of Play It Forward in key Latino areas. Featuring the story of Tony Gonzalez, these events serve as high-impact touchpoints that celebrate heritage while offering students a direct connection to a tangible role model.



Tag Your First Coach

The NFL will launch a social media initiative encouraging users to tag the first coach who shaped their journey. This highlights the long-term mentorship at the heart of the game and celebrates the people who provide that first affordable entry point into the sport.

Community Builders

Through a core YMCA partnership, this initiative facilitates weekly practices and supports returning participants, ensuring a reliable environment for growth. This framework is bolstered by a long-term mentorship model and a dedicated parent network, creating a multi-generational support system that lives within the community.

To solidify these bonds, we lean into Game Day Traditions. These traditions create a shared identity and foster deep relational bonding—such as tailgating with the same groups yearly—to turn participation into a lifelong habit.



Media Flowchart + Budget

The Play It Forward campaign comes to life through a phased, full-funnel media strategy designed to shift perception, build mental availability, and drive long-term emotional connection. Grounded in a \$400,000 budget outlined in the case brief, the plan prioritizes high-impact storytelling in Phase 1, high-frequency cultural relevance in Phase 2, and community-driven participation in Phase 3.

Activation	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Cost
Digital & Social												
#PlayItForward hero storytelling												\$ 35,000
Localized/multilingual content												\$ 35,000
YouTube/Paid Social ads												\$ 30,000
Short-Form Content												\$ 25,000
UGC Initiatives												\$ 20,000
Video & Streaming												
Streaming ads (Hulu, etc.)												\$ 35,000
Olympics ad moment												\$ 20,000
Influencers & Earned Media												
Multi-language podcasts												\$ 10,000
Influencer integrations												\$ 20,000
Athlete/Creator UGC												\$ 10,000
Partnerships												
Madden integration												\$ 20,000
Toyota partnership												\$ 15,000
School/Club Programs												\$ 30,000
Mental Health/Anti-bullying initiatives												\$ 15,000
Experiential/OOH												
Global Transit Ads												\$ 20,000
Flag Football HS Tour												\$ 35,000
Community film screenings												\$ 20,000
Total Campaign Expenditure												\$ 385,000

Designated Market Areas (DMAs)

Northeast

- New York, NY
- Boston, MA
- Philadelphia, PA

Midwest

- Chicago, IL
- Columbus, OH
- Minneapolis, MN

South

- Dallas, TX
- Houston, TX
- Miami, FL
- Atlanta, GA

West

- Los Angeles, CA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Seattle, WA

International

- Mexico City, Mexico
- São Paulo, Brazil
- London, UK
- Munich, Germany
- Toronto, Canada

Evaluation

Our agency will use Key Performance Indicators to measure the success of the “Play It Forward” campaign, with a contingency budget in place for necessary adjustments. To comprehensively evaluate the “Play It Forward” campaign, we recommend implementing the following KPIs and measurement tactics:

Reframe the Game - Evaluation Methods and KPIs

Phase 1

- Conduct baseline + post-campaign perception surveys to measure shifts in perception
- Track video completion rate & engagement on storytelling content
- Monitor brand sentiment + social listening trends
- Measure reach and impressions across OOH, TV, and digital
- Evaluate diversity of audience engagement

Make it Memorable - Evaluation Methods and KPIs

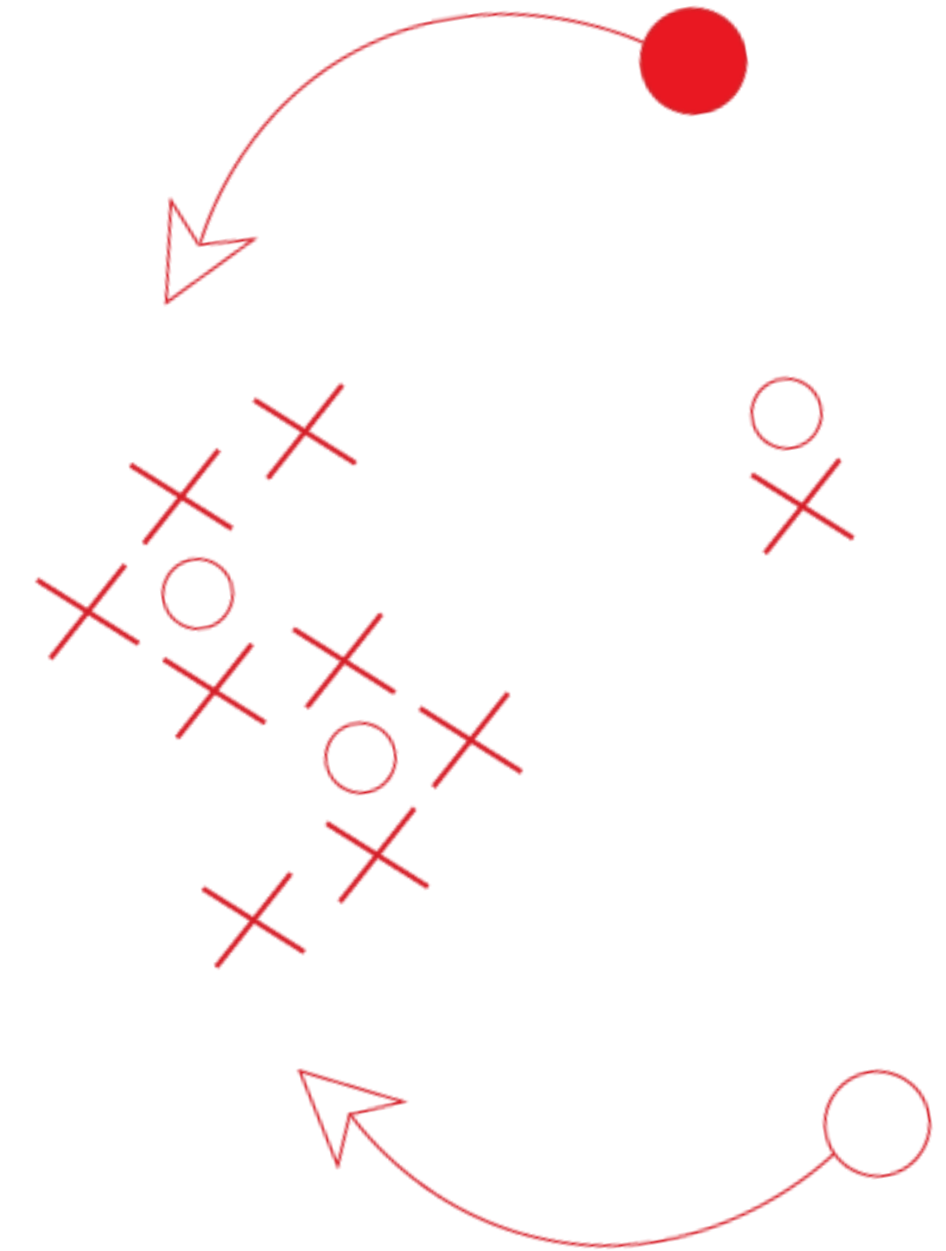
Phase 2

- Track unaided brand consideration lift through follow-up surveys
- Measure engagement rates across digital platforms
- Analyze participation intent + click-through rates
- Monitor frequency + recall effectiveness
- Evaluate partnership performance

Pass it On - Evaluation Methods and KPIs

Phase 3

- Track program participation + retention rates
- Measure user-generated content + community engagement
- Monitor event attendance + local activation impact
- Evaluate brand affinity and emotional connection
- Analyze long-term engagement indicators



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