



From Engagement to Return

Original Session at ADRP Annual Conference 2026

Original Speaker: Ramata (Rahma) Diallo, Founder and President, File l'Espoir

Introduction

There's a quiet crisis unfolding in blood donation programs worldwide, and it isn't a lack of awareness. Young people are seeing the campaigns, feeling the pull of the cause, and still walking away before they ever roll up their sleeve. And those who do donate once? Many never return.

Rahma Diallo, Founder and President of File l'Espoir in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, calls this the readiness gap and her framework reframes everything we think we know about youth donor retention.

Engagement Is Not Readiness

Here's the uncomfortable truth that Diallo puts front and center: *"A campaign can be visible, appealing, and even emotionally resonant, while still failing to move a young person from interest to first or repeat donation."* Awareness creates visibility. Readiness creates donors. Conflating the two is where most programs quietly break down.

Diallo maps the donor journey across five critical stages — from being reached, to showing interest, to showing up, to donating once, to returning — and identifies readiness as the most fragile variable threading through all of them. Her working definition is precise: donor readiness is *"the fragile stage between engagement and action that determines whether a young person feels clear enough, safe enough, and supported enough to start and then to return."*

Where the Journey Fractures

The breakdowns are predictable, cumulative, and — crucially — *designed into* most current systems by default. A young person who doesn't feel personally concerned won't build trust. Without trust, uncertainty amplifies fear. Fear stalls conversion. A poorly designed first experience closes the loop permanently.

Diallo identifies five distinct breakpoints: relevance and social permission, emotional readiness and eligibility confidence, the conversion moment itself, the first donation experience, and post-donation meaning and community. Each stage, left unintentionally designed, erodes readiness for the next.



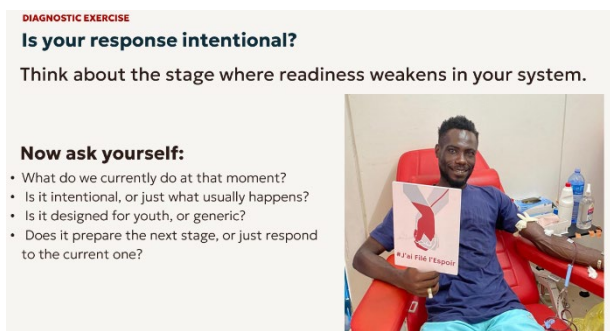


ADRP Annual Conference Insights

Retention Is Designed, Not Reminded

Perhaps the sharpest insight Diallo offers is this: **return donation is a design problem, not a motivation problem.** Too many organizations treat drop-off as a communications failure — send a reminder, run another campaign. But if the first donation was treated as an endpoint rather than the beginning of a relationship, no reminder will bridge that gap.

File l'Espoir is currently piloting a structured staff and volunteer training program to address how teams explain eligibility, respond to fear and hesitation, and reinforce continuity after donation. The hypothesis is bold and evidence-grounded: many journey breakdowns aren't about donors at all — they're about how the system meets donors at critical moments.



Slide from original presentation at 2026 ADRP Annual Meeting

A Diagnostic Worth Sitting With

Diallo closes with a reframe that every donor relations professional should internalize: *"Do not ask only, 'What barrier do we need to fix?' Ask instead, 'Where is readiness eroding across the journey, and how is our system contributing to that erosion?'"*

That's the question that changes practice.

