



Engage, Diversify, Recruit: Game-Changing Equity in Blood Donation

Original Session at ADRP Annual Conference 2023

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Summary

Blood donation is a critical public health need, yet many blood operators struggle to engage diverse communities as donors. A 2023 ADRP Annual conference session highlighted how community-based research and engagement can drive systemic changes to advance equity and inclusion in blood donation. Let's explore some key insights:

The Power of Community Engagement

Blood operators have historically excluded certain groups, like men who have sex with men, from donating. While policies have evolved, simply changing rules isn't enough - we need active community engagement:

- Give voice to underrepresented groups through open dialogue
- Commit to mutual benefit beyond organizational self-interest
- Foster shared responsibility in assessing risks and opportunities

By partnering with communities, we build trust and create more inclusive systems.

Leveraging Participatory Research

Researchers are using community-based participatory research (CBPR) to understand barriers and co-develop solutions:

- Interviews and surveys with diverse community members
- Advisory groups to guide research and interpret findings
- Co-creation of interventions like educational videos and websites

This approach helps address concerns about eligibility, fairness, and feeling welcomed as donors.

Addressing Systemic Barriers

To increase donation from racialized communities, we must confront institutionalized racism head-on:

- Increase diversity among staff and in marketing materials
- Partner with community leaders and organizations



- Provide cultural competency training for donor center staff
- Acknowledge past harms and commit to equity

Research with African, Caribbean and Black young adults highlights the need for transparency about deferral criteria and community-led outreach.

The Path Forward

By engaging diverse communities as partners, not just subjects, blood operators can:

- Build trust and accountability
- Develop more inclusive policies and practices
- Create culturally relevant recruitment strategies
- Meet the needs of an increasingly diverse patient population

Community-based approaches take time and resources but are essential for achieving true equity in blood donation. The future of a safe, sufficient blood supply depends on engaging all communities.

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