Peer-to-Peer Campaigns on Campus

Three projects focused on college students collectively added 5,000+ donor registrations to the New York registry.

A series of grants project funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Division of Transplantation helped New York Alliance for Donation and their grantees to implement organ procurement organizations (OPOs) add thousands of students aged 18 to 24 to the state’s donor registry. The participating groups were/discovered some very effective ways to work with college students to increase donor registrations.

Strategies that work:

- Engaging students about donation in classroom courses or online
- Promoting peer-to-peer, face-to-face conversations among students
- Identifying student champions with personal connections
- Offering campaign challenges with individual and team awards for most registrations generated

The second and third grant projects used the lessons learned from the first project with specific goals to develop a model that could be scaled to test the same strategies on new audiences. Thomas Feely, a communications professor at State University of New York at Buffalo and co-investigator on all three grants, said each project was organized to recruit students as the “peer-to-peer” or “student-to-student” campaign to other students.

“We left students to their own devices to promote donation,” said Feely. “So it was really about their creativity and motivation.”

During the earliest project conducted between 2003 and 2008, OPO staff educated students in public relations and communications courses at all 15 New York colleges about organ, eye, and tissue donation and allowed them to create the campaigns to promote organ donation to their peers. The campaign resulted in 3,869 donor registrations and significant improvements in the students’ knowledge of and attitudes toward donation.

LiveOnNY, formerly known as the New York Organ Donor Network, replicated the project in New York metro area colleges between 2007 and 2009 with more recently diverse student populations than the original project. The results were impressive: 70 percent of student registrants and they turned in registered a total of 1,700 of their peers.

Online-only campaigns showed similar impact

In the third grant project (2010-2011), New York Alliance for Donation enlisted college students interested in donation to create video about donation and promote the video and other online campaign materials via social media. The goal was to encourage their peers to register to donate. During the time of the campaign, the use of electronic signatures to register was not available.

The online campaign gained little traction at first but when the project coordinators created challenges, offering gift cards as an incentive for the team that got the most points, the projects were requested and noted in the online campaign brought in more donor cards. The project resulted in 671 requests for donor registration cards; 196 were completed and returned.

“Online campaigns may be effective as one piece of a larger strategy,” said Melanie Evans, Associate Director of New York Alliance for Donation. “Part of the regret of this project is that we didn’t have this easy online enrollment opportunity at the time. I think it could have been more successful.”

Learn more about these projects using the resources below.

Want to know more?

A Multi-Campus Intervention to Increase Organ and Tissue Donation
Principal Investigator: Thomas H. Feely, Ph.D., Thomas-Todd State University of New York, thfeely@rochester.edu, 716-585-1483
New York Alliance for Donation Contact: Melanie Evans, newyorkerdonationinfo.org, 511-302-2027


