

Planning a blood drive during COVID-19

A Playbook • 5/26/2020



Welcome

A message from Anya Greenberg and Hope Schwartz

Hello! We are two University of California San Francisco (UCSF) medical students who were inspired to act by an emerging need in our community and across the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the cancellation of thousands of community blood drives, usually held in public spaces like churches, schools and recreation centers. These drives are a major source of blood for hospitals, and a blood shortage could prove catastrophic for some of our patients. Fortunately, because elective surgeries were cancelled at the onset of the pandemic, the reduced blood supply was sufficient. But, as COVID-related restrictions begin to loosen, we can expect an increased demand for blood when surgical case loads and injuries return to prior levels. To meet that demand, a continuous pipeline of community blood donation is imperative.

In partnership with leaders within our organization, our interdisciplinary team organized multiple blood drives with special protocols to minimize risk of COVID-19 transmission. Though we started holding these drives under emergency conditions, **our team has created a safe, sustainable model for holding community blood drives during the COVID-19 pandemic – and beyond.**

We want to share our experience and learnings in order to make it as easy as possible for anyone to host a blood drive in the coming months. Though our drive was held at an academic medical center campus, **we hope this information will help you no matter where you are planning your drive.**

(And if you are interested, we also wrote about our experience in the [NEJM Catalyst](#))



Sections

The sections in this guide provide detailed advice and tips to help you plan your own community blood drive:

1. Form project team & find partners
2. Plan event logistics
3. Find donors & volunteers
4. Timeline of activities
5. Resources

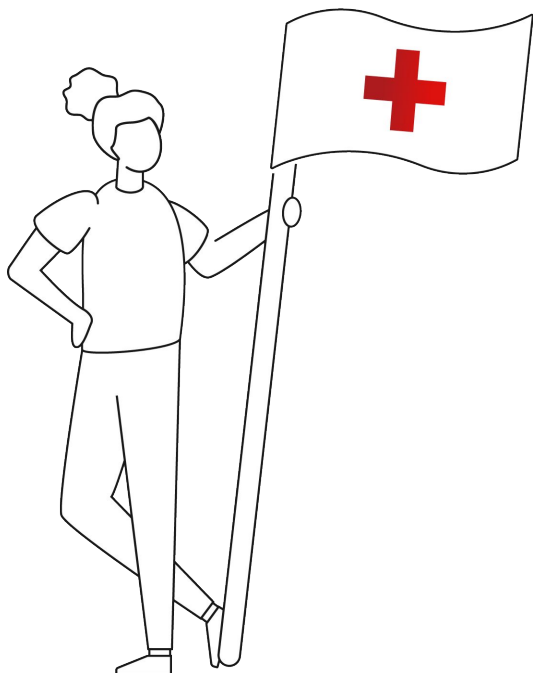
1. Form project team & find partners

1a. Decide who's leading the effort

It's important for a few people to step up, lead and coordinate the blood drive. We recommend more than one person - otherwise it could get overwhelming. For us, two students (with direct oversight by two senior faculty) was just right; we could easily divide tasks and still make quick decisions. Expect this work to be intensive for a few weeks, especially when planning your first drive. Then it will get easier, we promise.

1b. Find a blood provider

We recommend finding a blood provider partner in your community that has experience coming on-site for blood drives. We worked with a blood provider in San Francisco named Vitalant, and our main contacts were the Donor Recruitment Representative and Manager of Donor Recruitment. Vitalant provided all equipment and personnel for blood collection. American Red Cross is another national blood provider you can work with, and there may be other local organizations in your area.



1c. Create partnerships & identify point people within your organization

Multidisciplinary collaboration was vital to the success of our drives given the additional hurdles to clear during the COVID pandemic. You will want to form partnerships and get help from various groups with specific expertise; be sure to identify a specific **point-person** from each group who can be your primary contact. In our academic medical center setting, we worked with the following people and teams, which comprised our Virtual Blood Drive Working Group:

- **Faculty champions:** We had direct guidance and oversight from two senior UCSF faculty: the Chair of Laboratory Medicine and senior faculty in the Department of Surgery. One introduced us to our blood provider, a connection that was central to our effort.
- **Leadership champions:** Senior UCSF Health leadership (Chief Clinical Officer, Chief Medical Officer) and the UCSF School of Medicine Deans helped us address institutional and administrative hurdles, including working through COVID-19-related safety protocols, securing space for the drive, and facilitating organizational approvals.
- **Facilities Management** helped configure space for the drive and ensure appropriate furniture was available.
- **Parking Management** blocked off metered spaces so that blood provider vehicles (a U-haul sized truck and minivan) could park near the drive site.
- **Student volunteer coordinators** helped find and manage volunteers before and during the drive.
- **Campus Security** ensured that community members could enter UCSF's campus.
- **Media Relations and Communications** helped spread the word about the drives within our organization, connected us to local media to reach the broader San Francisco community, and created signage to direct donors and minimize unnecessary foot traffic.

2. Plan event logistics

2a. Find a location and think through configuration

We met with our blood provider and held an in-person walkthrough of potential spaces on the UCSF campus. Your blood provider can tell you what kind of space is ideal.

Our space requirements included:

- **More than 1500 square feet** (for optimal physical distancing) – we used a Gymnasium and a large Banquet Hall for our two locations
- **Temperature control** to ensure cool environment
- **Adequate electrical supply** (normal outlets are fine)
- **Ramp accessibility** for moving equipment and blood products into and out of space
- **Nearby parking** where the blood provider could leave their vehicles for the duration of the drive
- It wasn't a requirement, but we also chose a location that was **convenient for donors** but **separate from patient care** areas to minimize foot traffic near clinical spaces

2b. Plan a date (or dates) for your drive

When planning dates, make sure that:

- Your **space** is available during the time you need it (for us, this was between 8am and 5pm.)
- Your **blood partner** is able to staff the drive
- **There's enough lead time** to plan logistics (this can be accelerated; we planned and executed our drives in 2 weeks, versus the typical 8-12 weeks)
- Your proposed drive matches up with the big picture **need for blood** (e.g., if there's no need for blood tomorrow, there's no need to hold a drive tomorrow)

2c. Establish safety protocols and plan for donor flow

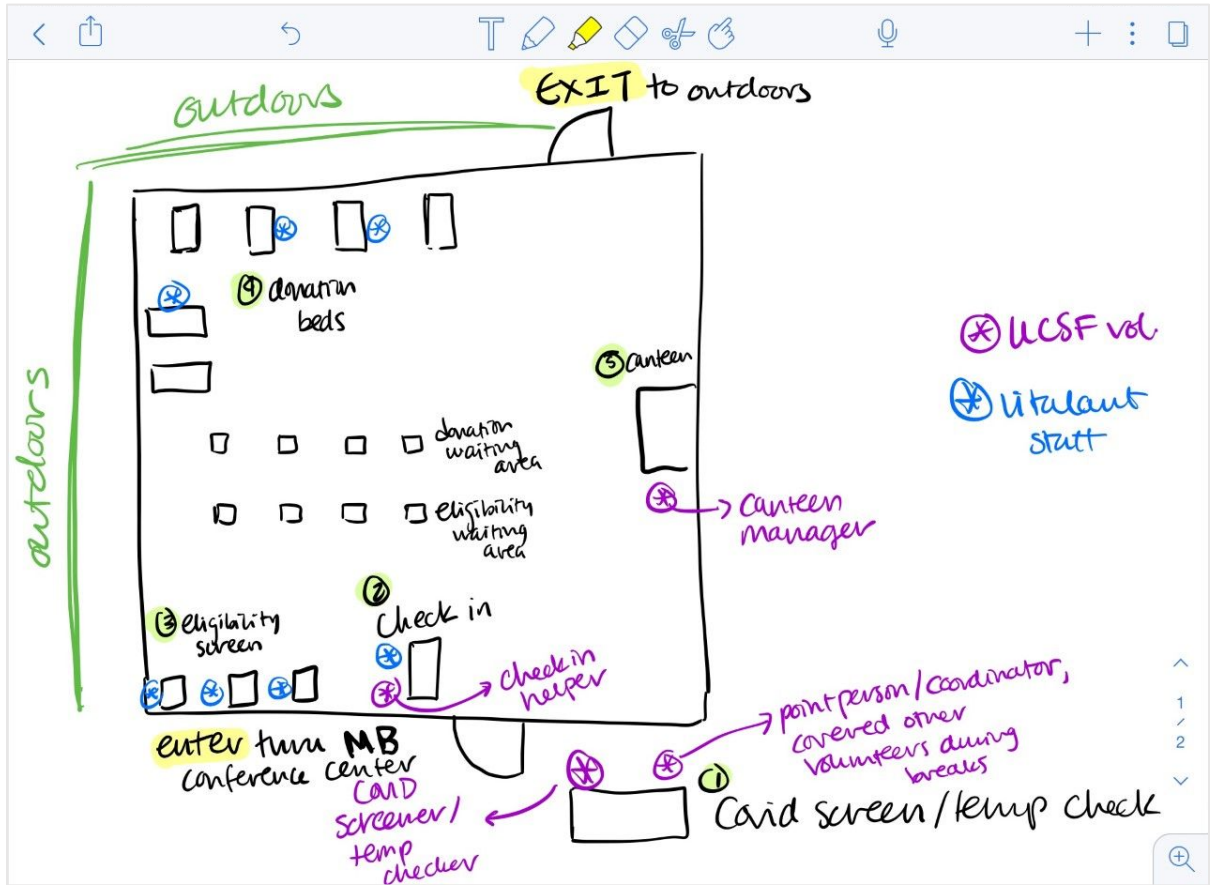
We established protocols for preventing COVID-19 transmission in conjunction with our blood provider and UCSF Health leadership.

Our protocol was the following:

- **Screening:** Before entering the donation area, all Vitalant staff, volunteers, and donors had a verbal COVID-19 screen and temperature check. This was a standard screening developed by UCSF and used at all UCSF sites.
- **Distancing:** All check-in and screening stations, waiting area chairs, blood donation tables, and canteen stations were set up greater than six feet apart.
- **PPE use:** We followed CDC guidelines for Personal Protective Equipment use: blood provider staff and volunteers wore surgical masks and gloves, and donors were asked to come with an appropriate face covering. Donors without coverings were provided surgical masks. (We asked our blood provider partner to provide PPE for their staff, and we worked with our campus' COVID-19 Command Center to procure masks for volunteers and donors.)
- **Scheduling:** Appointments were scheduled every 15 minutes to minimize crowding.
- **Visitors:** No visitors were allowed in the donation area.
- **Walk-ins:** We did not advertise walk-in availability, to prevent crowding. But we did accept some walk-ins as replacements for no-shows and screenouts, or when staff had extra capacity. We required prospective walk-in donors to leave the area and wait for a phone call instead of waiting in the donor area, as they would in a standard drive.
- **Disinfection:** Vitalant followed extensive disinfection practices throughout the drive.
- **Snacks:** We handed out post-donation canteen snacks (provided by Vitalant) individually.
- **Donor flow:** We marked the arrival area with tape to show donors where to stand as they waited to be screened and checked-in. When donation was complete, donors exited from a separate door to maintain forward flow through the space.

2d. Create a diagram of your space

This will help the team visualize how distancing and donor flow will work. Here is a sample from our drive, created on an iPad:



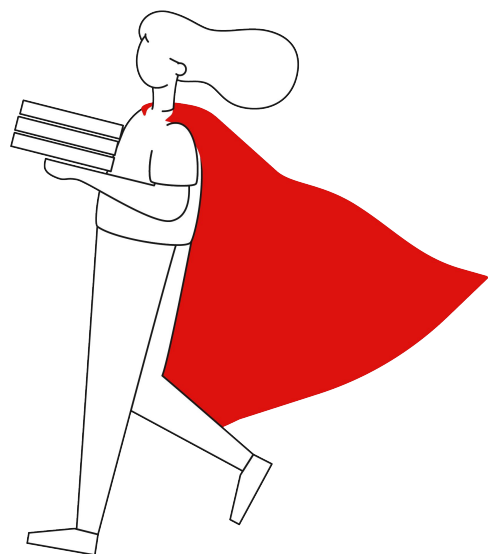
3. Find donors & volunteers

3a. Find volunteers to staff the drive

Your blood provider partner and your organization (if applicable) can help determine how many volunteers are needed and for what roles. Our blood provider recommended 3 volunteers to staff different parts of the drive (temperature check, check-in, canteen manager,) and UCSF required a COVID-19 screener. We also had one point-person coordinating all blood drive activities and triaging issues as they came up.

For us, student volunteers were key; four student volunteer coordinators recruited and staffed our blood drives with health professions students. The student volunteer coordinators did the following:

1. Developed a sign-up sheet with a description of each role and sign-up instructions (you can find an example in [this toolkit](#))
2. Reached out to the entire UCSF health professional student body through internal email list-serves and other communication channels (e.g., slack, GroupMe)
3. Monitored the sign-up sheet leading up to the drives to make sure staffing was adequate and did additional outreach as needed
4. Served as operations leads on the days of the drives, overseeing all student volunteers and triaging any day-of issues that arose



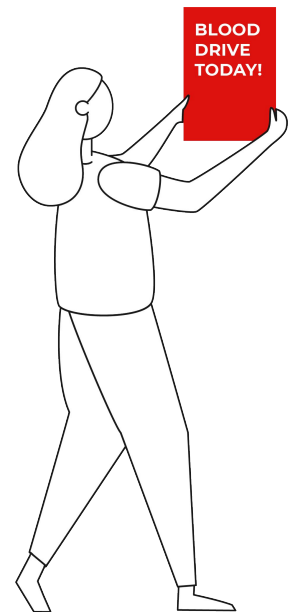
3b. Create a communication plan & recruit donors

Think about what types of donors you are targeting, and consider how you will reach them. In an effort to create an inclusive community event, we recruited from both UCSF and the San Francisco community through internal UCSF messaging via internal list-serves, social media and local media coverage.

Here are some tasks that may help with your communications planning:

- Draft a message that makes it clear why donating is important, with a call to action; highlight that donating blood is safe and allowed during COVID-19.
- Include a direct link to sign up along with logistical information (e.g., location, no visitor policy, etc.)
- Mention eligibility requirements (you could link to your blood provider's eligibility site or another reliable source such as the [American Red Cross](#)). Only about 37% of Americans are eligible to donate blood, and you don't want donors to be turned away unnecessarily.
- Get review and sign-off by leadership.
- Work with the communications team to determine the best channels for reaching your donors (e.g. list serves, social media, etc.)

As a result of this strategy, 100% of our available appointments were filled before the drive. 73% of our donors were first-time donors, which is significantly higher than usual and indicates a large, motivated, previously untapped pool of potential blood donors.



3c. Ensure appointments are filled and plan for cancellations & no-shows

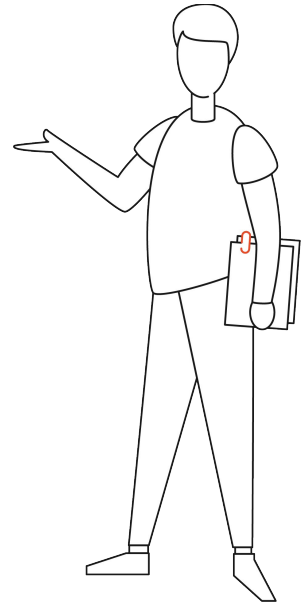
The following strategies helped us reach 90% of total donation capacity at our drives – which is quite good, compared to a standard blood drive.

- **Monitor the back-end scheduling tool** that you may be given access to as a drive coordinator. Having this access will allow you to:
 - see how many & which appointment slots are open to help guide marketing efforts.
 - add, cancel, and adjust appointments for donors who reach out individually.
 - download donor contact information for appointment reminder outreach.
- **Create an 'alternate' list** of potential donors who were not able to secure a spot initially whom you might call on when you have more than 24 hours notice of a cancellation. We drew from students and staff at UCSF.
- **Send personalized reminder emails** to scheduled donors the night before the drive (in addition to any automated reminders from the blood provider).
- **Allow walk-ins** to help with no-shows and screen-outs. Discuss with your blood drive partner how you will track and call-back day-of-drive walk-ins who are not waiting on-site.

4. Your checklist

Immediately when starting to plan drive

- Decide who's leading the effort
- Find a blood provider
- Create partnerships & identify point people within your organization
- Find a location and think through configuration
- Let facilities know about table/chair needs and set-up based on blood provider's needs
- Plan a date (or dates) for your drive
- Secure parking for blood partner trucks
- Notify relevant parties (security, etc.) that the drive is happening
- Start recruiting donors: create communications materials and publicize your drive via email and social media



Throughout

- Plan for cancellations and no-shows: collect the names, emails, and phone numbers of individuals who were not able to make an appointment so they can be standbys
- Monitor appointment availability
- Provide regular updates to your leadership/oversight team

1-2 weeks before

- If open appointments remain, re-publicize drive through your organization's email distribution channels and social media
- Ensure with facilities that space will be unlocked and ready for set-up at agreed-upon arrival time
- Create signage for the event
- Secure volunteers to staff the drive

2 days before

- Send reminder email to drive volunteers
- Obtain the most current COVID-19 verbal screening tool from your organization (if applicable)

1 day before

- Send mass email (remember to BCC!) to scheduled donors reminding them about their upcoming appointment
- Fill any openings that arise from last minute cancellations with stand-by's

Day of

- Arrive 1-2 hours prior to drive start time (as determine with blood partner) to set up
- Hang signs directing donors where to go
- Introduce volunteers to blood partner team and orient them to their roles
- Have fun! Be ready with a great playlist!

When it's over

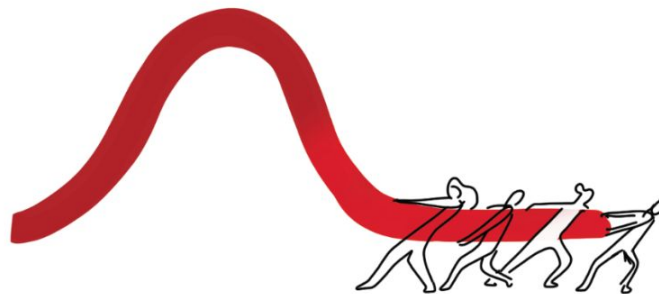
- Check with your team to learn what could have gone better - so that things could go more smoothly next time
- Consider sharing what you've learned with other groups who interested in holding blood drives during this time

5. Resources

Thank you for reading!

We hope this playbook was useful for you. Below are some additional links and resources:

- [Additional templates and samples](#) (emails, volunteer recruitment tool, sign-up list, etc.)
- Our article in the [NEJM Catalyst](#): Emergency Blood Drives during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A New Model of Collaboration among UCSF Leadership, Medical Students, and a Community Partner
- [Vitalant](#)
- [Red Cross](#)
- [4 Things to Know About Donating Blood during COVID-19](#)



The Emergency Design Collective is a team of doctors, designers, makers, and academics working on future problems and right now solutions to the global pandemic. Learn more at emergencydesigncollective.com.