

Background

Some Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) individuals face barriers to research participation, including communication challenges, institutional mistrust (for example, skepticism toward healthcare due to past experiences of being excluded or misunderstood), and limited awareness of study opportunities¹.

These participation barriers contribute to continued exclusion from research and are often overlooked by traditional recruitment methods, which typically lack meaningful connections within DDBHH networks².

This study explores three promising approaches for reaching systematically marginalized DDBHH individuals and addressing participation barriers: **community-based** recruitment through trusted local organizations, **digital** outreach via social media and email platforms, and **peer referral** networks that build on existing social connections.

Research Question

How do **community-based**, **digital**, and **peer referral** approaches compare in overcoming participation barriers among systematically marginalized DDBHH individuals?



Method

- Multiple recruitment pathways - Direct engagement at community events, participant referrals, and digital outreach through social media and email platforms
- Flexible survey administration - Bilingual surveys conducted in-person at community events or remotely via videoconferencing to accommodate diverse communication preferences and geographic barriers
- Community partnership approach - Regular meetings with community partners to identify outreach strategies responsive to the needs of DDBHH communities and leverage existing trust networks³
- Systematic effectiveness tracking - Compared engagement levels across community-based events, digital outreach, and peer referral mechanisms to determine optimal strategies for reaching systematically marginalized DDBHH individuals

Findings

Digital outreach often does not effectively reach the targeted population, as reflected by a high inflow of ineligible recruits.

In contrast, in-person **community-based** events with booths offering ASL support and visual materials fostered more authentic engagement, especially among adults, as community members played a key role in building trust and encouraging participation, significantly improving recruitment.

Key participation barriers included reluctance to spend time on surveys and misunderstandings about the university's role. Some people assumed the booth was related to admissions rather than research.

Peer referral had the greatest impact. Many participants approached the booth based on existing relationships or recognition through mutual connections.

Discussion

Face-to-face recruitment, as demonstrated by in-person gatherings with ASL support and visual materials, builds community trust and reduces technology-related barriers.

Partnering with local DDBHH organizations and trusted liaisons expands reach through community endorsement. Recruitment is most effective when in-person engagement establishes trust before transitioning to videoconferencing.

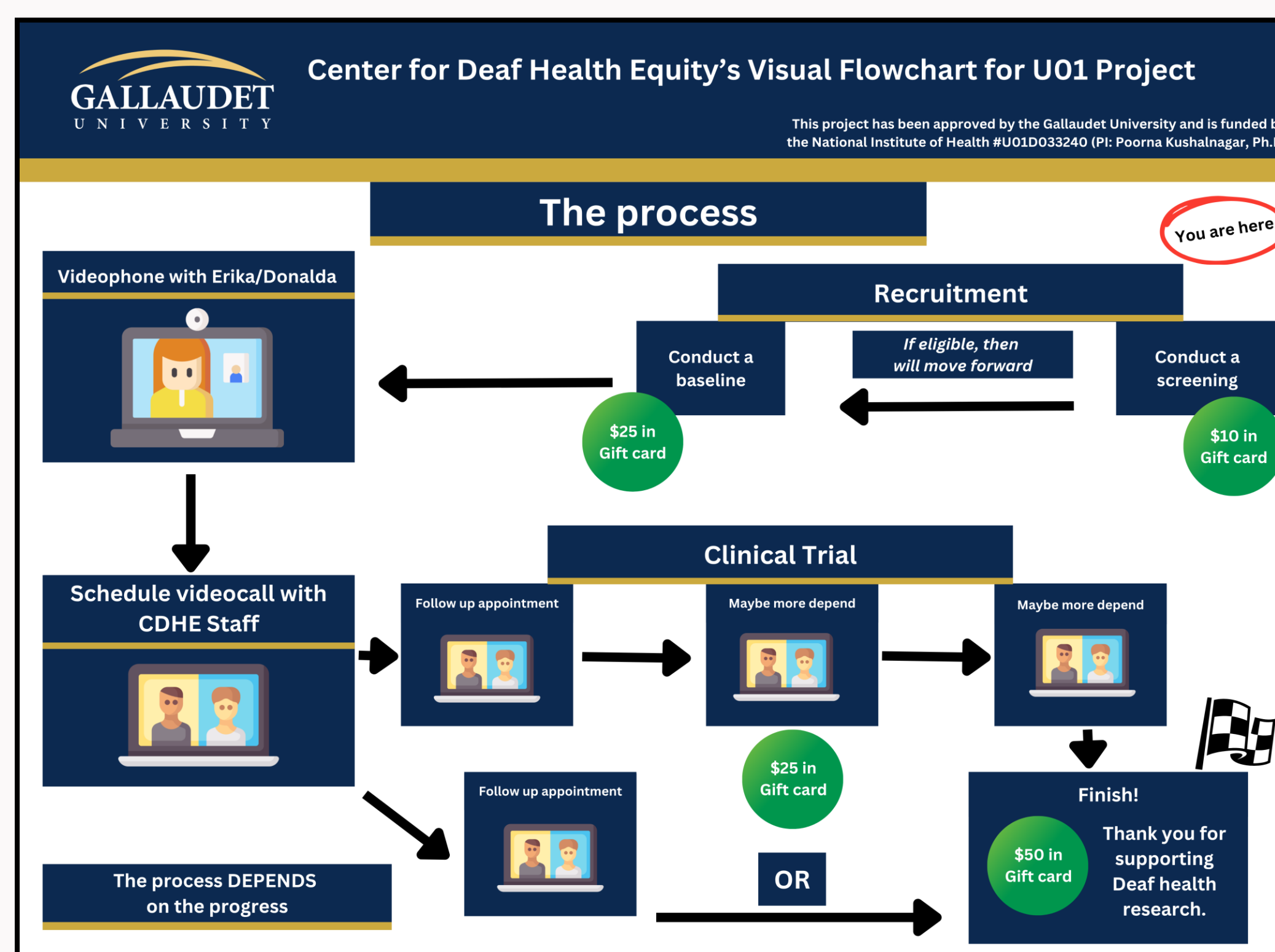
Prospective recruits are more likely to engage in research studies when they recognize our community partners.

Conclusion

Community partnerships, peer referral, and accessible tools (e.g., ASL support, visual informed consent) are key to effective recruitment.

These strategies build trust and address participation barriers such as time constraints and skepticism stemming from past exclusion, promoting greater inclusion of DDBHH individuals in research.

References



We thank our community partners Leticia Arellano, Danny Lucero, and Jerrin George for their dedication to community-driven research and participant recruitment. We also appreciate the DDBHH organization staff and community members—Juan Fumero-Carrion, Ronelle Johnson, Sherry Shimizu, and Mary Dall—for their support. Special thanks to Dr. Ammons, Dr. Knight, Emmanuel Perrodin-Njoku, Aparna Lele, Adam Novsam, Katherine Manalpas, DT Bruno, Hiruni Hewapathirana-Mayadunne, Ciara Luttrell, and Clayton Lawson for their roles in recruitment and data collection.