While there are nearly 3 million deaths in the United States each year, the pool of potential organ donors is actually very small — a little more than ½ of a percent of total deaths.

To be medically eligible for donation, an organ donor must:
- Die from an insult or injury to the brain, and be on a ventilator to maintain heart function and blood flow to organs.

When a donor is identified, the OPO is called and:
- Determines if the potential donor is on their state registry or if family members should be approached about possible donation.
- OPOs work with families to ensure that those donors who desire to give the gift of life are honored.
- When there is authorization for donation, the OPO conducts a thorough medical evaluation to identify any other issues that might impact organ donation (e.g., cancer, infectious disease).

Once a donor is successfully qualified for organ recovery:
- The OPO follows the national “list” database for those matching patients, and contacts the respective transplant centers in sequence.
- It is up to the transplant center to decide whether to take an organ. Sometimes they decide it’s not the right match for a variety of reasons. In that case, the OPO follows the national protocol working with transplant centers to identify the next recipient.
- For every successful match, the OPO facilitates authorization, testing, the recovery of the donor organs, and delivery to the transplant center.

Despite limitations within the current system, OPO efforts have contributed to a steady increase in the identification of organ DONORS and organs TRANSPLANTED since 2012.