

## How to Listen to your Online Community

### Set up a Google Reader

A Google reader is like a personal library for all of your subscriptions and alerts. You can also get alerts via email, but a reader tends to make listening a lot easier by keeping all of the conversations you're following in one place and limiting the amount of email you get. Google readers will also allow you to subscribe to blogs.

#### How to set up a Google Reader:

- Go to <http://google.com/reader>
- If you already have a Google account, like a Gmail account, you can log in with that.
- If not, create an account.
- Once your account is created, Google can help you find blogs you're interested in.
- You can also now subscribe to content, like a particular search term or a blog, anytime you see the following icon: 

### Set up an Alert

Alerts allow you to flag certain key words or search terms so that you can now be notified anytime they appear on the internet. The instructions below are for Google alerts, but you can also get alerts through [Technorati](#), [Blogpulse](#) or other tools.

#### How to set up an alert:

- Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts>
- Enter search terms and select whether what type of alerts you'd like.
- If you have a Google reader account, make sure you're logged in so that subscribing to the alerts by *feed* is an option.
- Subscribe by "Feed" to get alerts sent to your reader, or by email.

**Hints on Alerts:** Adding localizers will help you to narrow the results to your area. For example, instead of setting up an alert for "United Way" which may bring in too many results, try:

- "United Way" and State Name (e.g., "United Way" and Massachusetts)
- "United Way" and local city name (e.g., "United Way" and Boston)
- While you can set up an alert for your full organizational name (e.g., "United Way of Massachusetts Bay") know that most bloggers or outlets will probably just refer to you as United Way, and you may miss some results.
- Also search for topics that are important to your work. (e.g. "Housing First" and Massachusetts)

### Set up a Twitter Alert

Want to hear it straight from the people? Set up a twitter search alert. Twitter is a site which enables people to report on what they're thinking, experiencing, reading, loving, hating, doing, etc. all in quick bursts. At this moment there are hundreds of people talking about United Way on Twitter. To sort it all out, you can set up a twitter alert.

#### Hot to set up an alert:

- Visit <http://search.twitter.com/>
- Search for "United Way". This will give you results from throughout the country. To the right of the results, you'll see:  Feed for this query. Click on that and choose how you'd like to get the alerts.
- Search for "United Way" *near:cityname*, for example: "United Way" *near:Boston* to get tweets on United Way from your region. Make sure there is no space between *near:* and the *location*. Then subscribe by clicking the feed icon to the right of the results.

Why do you need to keep an eye on national results? Because hot button issues that bubble up in one part of the country, can end up affecting your organization, and being aware of them early can help you prepare. The same goes for positive experiences or efforts that really catch on with the public, such as the give5now campaign.

# When to Respond

## Oh my God they're talking about us, now what?!!

You do not need to respond to every comment that arises about your organization. Listening in its own right can help inform and shape your work. Each organization should decide for itself what its response policy should be. Here are a few guidelines that we follow.

### When to respond:

- A factually inaccurate comment of your organization or its work.
  - Don't get mad. Just politely correct the error and link to a source for backup if possible. Invite the poster to contact you or the organization for more information
- A negative comment or a question about your specific organization or its work on a blog or online article with a large audience (200 followers or more).
  - You don't need to respond to every negative comment that comes by, but if the blogger or commenter's audience is large, it's probably a good idea
  - Again, if the comment is negative, don't get mad. You're there to listen & inform. Ask about more details from a bad experience or help answer any questions that arise.
- A comment about a positive experience giving, advocating or volunteering with United Way.
  - This is a great opportunity to thank your community for Living United. Use the opportunity to describe the impact that their support will have.
  - You may not be able to respond to everyone, but do it when you can.
- If an article or blog talks about an issue area in which your United Way has been making progress. Again, you don't have to comment every time, but it's a nice way to get the word out.

### When not to respond:

- If the blogger or commenter is talking about another United Way.
  - You wouldn't talk on behalf of another United Way to the media, don't do it here either.
- If the blogger or commenter is clearly baiting, being antagonistic, or trying to incite a fight.
- You only have so much time! You don't have to respond to every comment about United Way. Respond only, when you think it's productive or important.

### Hints on responding about United Way:

- Be transparent -- say that you work at a United Way.
- At the same time, stress that you're speaking as an individual.
- Don't pick fights or get pulled into them. They're not productive.
- Don't speak negatively about another organization or individual.
- Answer thoughtfully, ask questions, your goal is to learn and inform.
- Provide a link to relevant content on your website.

### An example of how responding can turn a negative comment into a learning experience:

<http://www.patriotledger.com/news/x7529572/South-Shore-organizations-get-130-000-from-United-Way>

Note what happens when the negative comment from "o2fishmore" is responded to by one of our partner agencies (gtarbox). Gtarbox is able to correct the inaccurate information and refocus the original poster on how the agency can help her. United Way then provided additional information about the investment and calling 2-1-1 for help.

More information and tools: <http://socialmedia-listening.wikispaces.com/>