# Engaging Bloggers: Strategic Considerations

## Purpose

Tap into the communication reach of bloggers and other people who write about your public report. This can increase the number of instances in which your public report, and other products or priorities of your Collaborative, are mentioned in Web sites and online publications.

## Considerations

1. **Blogs are an important part of media.** Online culture is now a routine part of mass media and related communication, as technology enables nearly anyone to contribute opinions and ideas to the community discourse. Print and online newspapers, for example, have fewer traditional reporters. Many online newspapers include blogs as a regular feature, either by paying a person (often a reporter who used to be an employee of the newspaper) to write original blogs or by pulling content from external sources, including independent blogs. Some independent blogs may be popular enough to consider them as viable channels for getting information to target audiences and the public. Two ideas for identifying which blogs might be important communication channels for your Collaborative are:

* Read your local online papers to identify the authors of the regularly featured blogs.
* Search http://technorati.com/blogs/top100 to identify the most popular blogs in health care or in your region.

1. **Bloggers are independent reporters.** Anyone can write a blog, but some bloggers can get more attention to their writing than others. A number of newspapers have hired reporters who are former employees to write a blog for the publication; however, many bloggers do not come from a traditional media background. Some are medical professionals with a knack for writing; others are community writers with a strong interest in health care. Some have had bad experiences with health care and hold a grudge. While in the past there were generally understood rules for professional relationships between organizations and traditional reporters, the range of types of bloggers is large, so the rules for working with bloggers are less standardized.
2. **Real communication is important to engage bloggers.** Given the independent nature of most bloggers, building a constructive relationship is likely to involve less structure and more personalized, direct communication. For example:

* **Approach.** Sending a news release to some bloggers is acceptable, but likely insufficient, as traditional media relations can seem overly structured or seem like “spin.” Send the news release, but then take time to follow up with a personalized email or phone call to explain the key messages and discuss the blogger’s reactions or questions. There is great value in meeting in person to begin building the relationship and it is best to do this early, rather than waiting until you are pitching an important story.
* **Be real.** Being willing to engage in real discussions is likely to be interpreted by bloggers as a sign of respect and trust. Don’t be afraid to admit what is challenging or where compromises have been needed to make progress with the public report. Trust is a two-way street: just as the blogger wants honest information from you, you will hope the blogger writes about the news in a way that is true, includes some (or all) of your key messages and isn’t exaggerated or sensationalized.

See Toolkit Resource 6b for an email template to connect with one or more bloggers to discuss the upcoming release of your public report.