

Guiding Principles for The Methods Groups of The Campbell Collaboration

- I Guiding Principles**
- II Functions of Methods Groups**
 - A Providing policy advise
 - B Providing training and support
 - C Conducting empirical studies and maintaining bibliographies
 - D Monitoring the quality of reviews
 - E Serving as a forum for discussion
- III List of Active Methods Groups**
- IV Procedures for Requesting Methods Group Registration**
- V Procedures for Evaluating Methods Group Registration Requests**
- VI Annual Reports of Methods Group Activities**
 - A Checklist for monitoring the annual progress of Campbell methods groups
- VII Procedures for Carrying Out Functions of Methods Groups**
 - A Providing Policy Advise
 - B Training and review group support
 - i. Workshops
 - C Conducting empirical studies
 - D Monitoring the quality of reviews
 - E Serving as a forum for discussion
- VIII Functions of the Campbell Center for Systematic Review Methodology**
- IX Joint Cochrane-Campbell Methods Groups**
- X Working Committee**

I Guiding Principles

The Campbell Collaboration is an international organization that aims to prepare, maintain, and disseminate high-quality, systematic reviews of studies of effectiveness. By supporting the production of these reviews and by disseminating results in an accessible fashion, the Campbell Collaboration intends to contribute to decisions in practice, policy and to public understanding. The Campbell methods groups should work closely with the methods groups of the Cochrane Collaboration and these principles have drawn on the equivalent guidance for those groups.

The methods groups within the Campbell Collaboration strive to constantly improve the methodology of research synthesis and to disseminate state-of-the-art reviewing methods.

II. Functions of Methods Groups

Methods groups within the Campbell Collaboration have five general functions:

- providing advice on methodology and methods policy
- providing training and support
- conducting empirical research
- helping to monitor the quality of systematic reviews prepared within the Collaboration
- serving as a forum for discussion.

The relative importance of the functions will vary among methods groups and within groups over time.

A. Providing advice on methodology and methods policy

Advice from the methods groups is needed by:

- the Steering Group of the Collaboration
- those responsible for core functions (such as developing software and training materials)
- those involved in the preparation and maintenance of reviews.

This methodological advice helps with two types of decision:

- (1) Decisions about the methods that are used to prepare and maintain reviews. For example, reviewers, editorial teams, those who provide training for reviewers, and those responsible for software development need advice on how to locate studies, assess the quality of studies, summarize and integrate study outcomes, and interpret and present results.
- (2) Decisions about the methods that are used by the Collaboration to meet its aims. For example, review groups, centers, those involved in software development, and the Steering Group need advice about how

to code and keep track of studies, reviews, and people so that they can easily be found when needed.

The role of methods groups for both types of decision is to provide guidance for those responsible for decisions (e.g. the Steering Group or the editorial team of a review group), not to take decisions for them.

B. Providing training and support

Methods groups play an important role in providing training for reviewers, other trainers and potential users of reviews, often in workshops at the main meetings of the Campbell Collaboration at other sites as well.

C. Conducting empirical studies

As far as possible, the advice that methods groups provide should be based on sound evidence. This implies that methods groups need to maintain up-to-date systematic reviews of the empirical evidence relevant to their scope, and that they should be prepared to help fill gaps by conducting primary methodological research. Methods groups are also expected to maintain a bibliography of relevant methodological articles.

D. Monitoring the quality of reviews

Active monitoring of the quality of Campbell reviews may become a core function of some methods groups.

E. Serving as a forum for discussion

Although it will often be this fifth function that brings people together, serving as a forum for discussion should not be sufficient grounds to register a group formally as part of the Collaboration.

III List of Active Methods Groups

The three methods groups currently under consideration for formal registration are:

- Empirical research
- Implementation/Process
- Nonrandomized designs
- Statistics

IV Procedures for Requesting Methods Group Registration

New methods groups are expected to register in much the same way as other Campbell Collaboration entities. That is, interested parties hold exploratory meetings, these people and others as appropriate review and prepare an application conforming to the registration criteria, and approval is sought from the Campbell Collaboration Steering Group.

The methods groups representative on the Steering Group is responsible for assisting with the preparation of an application to register as a methods group. This includes advice on the preparation of a draft module for the group, the collection of indicators of support from relevant individuals and entities within the Collaboration, and clarification about the role of the proposed methods group in assisting with the preparation of high-quality Campbell reviews. The draft module for the group would describe their scope, the topics of interest to them, and information on how they will fulfill the role of a methods group.

Each methods group is required to have at least two convenors and, if possible, these should be from different countries. It is the responsibility of the convenors to provide a point of contact for members of the methods group and for Campbell entities that need help from the group.

Typically, application materials will include:

- A cover letter from the group's convenors to the Campbell Collaboration Steering Committee that summarizes the content of the application
- Contact details for the convenor who will respond to queries on behalf of the proposed group
- A statement of background that describes how the work of the proposed methods group will further the aims of the Campbell Collaboration
- A statement of scope that details the specific aims or goals of the group
- An analysis of how the scope of the proposed group fits with existing methods groups, especially with regard to any potential areas of overlap
- A list of proposed initial topics or a research agenda to be considered by the group, including target dates for completion
- A list of initial group members and contributors to the preparation of the application
- A diary of meetings held in the preparation of the proposal and planned meetings and workshops (minutes of meetings should be appended to the proposal)
- Acknowledgments of past and future financial and administrative support
- Biographical sketches of the convenors
- Letters of support from
 - members of the group that describe how they will contribute to it
 - review groups, other methods groups, and other relevant entities

V Procedures for Evaluating Methods Group Registration Requests

When establishing methods groups, a balance needs to be struck between the Collaboration's principles of "building on people's existing enthusiasm and interests" and "minimizing duplication of effort". In the first few years of the Collaboration, enthusiasm and established interests should generally be allowed to dominate over the prevention of duplication, so that those with specific interests relevant to the aims of the Collaboration are encouraged to pursue them. Initially, this may result in more overlap than is desirable, so

eventually more consideration will be given to avoiding unnecessary duplication and proliferation of methods groups with common interests.

When assessing the application of a proposed methods group, the Steering Group will consider the following criteria. In the long term, it is expected that methods groups will successfully meet all criteria, however, in considering the applications, the Steering Committee will take into account the resources available for these efforts. Submitters of applications are encouraged to identify a number of goals and foci to be consistent with the resources available to them.

- Is the proposed methods group dealing with a methodological issue that is pertinent to the Campbell Collaboration and not already under study?
- Has the group made contact with the Campbell Methods Center, to ensure linkage to other interested individuals? (Neither of the first two criteria will be used to discourage multiple methods groups from tackling the same problem simultaneously at different sites.)
- Will the group hold workshops at, and otherwise contribute to, the meetings of the Campbell Collaboration?
- Will the group produce interim reports for widespread dissemination and discussion throughout the Collaboration?
- Will the group hold open meetings or, if closed, collaborate with the Steering Group in selecting invitees?
- Will the group convene workshops on specific methodological issues in response to the needs of the Collaboration?
- Will the group generate research agendas that serve the goals of the Collaboration?
- Will the group help to distinguish opinions from evidence with respect to methods by preparing and maintaining systematic reviews of empirical evidence within their scope?
- Is the methods group maintaining a bibliography of related methods literature?

Methods groups are expected to prepare and maintain modules for inclusion in *The Campbell Library*. The modules are updated at least once a year or more frequently if there have been important changes. They contain contact details and information about the scope, membership, and activities of each methods group. Workshop reports and other documents of general interest can also be incorporated in methods group modules.

VI Annual Review of Methods Group Activities

Methods groups, like other entities, are expected to set targets against which their contribution to the aims of the Collaboration can be measured. Their progress is monitored on an annual basis by the Methods Coordinating Group, in order to identify problems and provide support to help them achieve their objectives and meet their targets. The review process may also lead to a recommendation to the Steering Group for de-registration of groups unable to meet their goals. The following is an exhaustive list. In monitoring

performance the stage of development of the methods group will be taken into account.

A. Checklist for monitoring the annual progress of Campbell methods groups

- Number of times advice was requested by or offered to the Steering Group? Was advice provided when requested?
- Number of times advice requested by or offered to other entities? Was advice provided when requested?
- Did the methods group contribute to improving the Campbell Reviewers' Handbook?
- Number of training workshops?
- Number of workshops aimed at advancing methodology?
- Number of reports prepared?
- Number of empirical studies completed?
- Number of empirical studies currently underway?
- Number of methodology reviews completed or updated?
- Number of articles contributed to the Campbell Review Methodology Database? [note: point for discussion]
- Number of assessments of the Campbell Database of Systematic Reviews or other assessments of methodological performance within the Collaboration?
- Was feedback provided to reviewers or the appropriate entities in a constructive way for any methodological assessments that were undertaken?
- What other forms of support has the methods group provided towards preparing and maintaining high quality reviews, promoting access to Campbell reviews, or improving the efficiency of the Collaboration?
- Number of meetings of the methods group?
- Does the methods group have an active e-mail discussion list?
- Has the methods group met its targets for the year?
- In what areas did the methods group successfully contribute to the Campbell Collaboration?
- In what areas should the methods group have contributed to the Campbell Collaboration but has not done so?

In considering the applications, the Steering Committee will take into account the resources available for these efforts. Submitters of applications may consider prioritizing goals and foci to be consistent with the resources available to them.

VII. Procedures for Carrying Out Functions of Methods Groups

Initially, few Campbell methods groups are likely to have separate funding to support their roles within the Collaboration. They will probably need to rely on the voluntary efforts of their members and, usually, administrative support from the host institute of a convenor. It is the responsibility of the convenors

to provide a point of contact for members of the methods group and for Campbell entities who need help from the group.

A. Providing Policy Advice

The Campbell Reviewers' Handbook. The aim of the *Campbell Reviewers' Handbook* is to help reviewers make good decisions about the methods used in systematic reviews. It is intended to undergo a major update every 1-2 years. The revisions are overseen by the *Handbook* editors and an advisory board made up of (1) representatives of those involved in the preparation and maintenance of Campbell reviews and (2) methodological experts, including the convenors of all registered methods groups (Methods Coordinating Group).

The guidelines in the *Handbook* are intended to help reviewers to be systematic and explicit about the questions they pose and how they derive answers to those questions. The guidelines complement any specific guidelines that have been prepared by individual review groups.

B. Training and review group support

Specific forms of support are sometimes required beyond training, but it is important to clarify which expectations of methods groups are reasonable and which are not. For example, most – if not all - methods groups should not be expected to respond to direct requests for support from individual reviewers or anyone else who might approach them. In general, methods groups must be viewed as scarce resources that are best used to address general issues filtered through entities such as review groups, centers, and the Steering Group.

For some methodological issues it is desirable for each review group to identify someone who can provide the support that is needed. This is particularly true for a Statistics Methods Group and each Campbell review group should have a consultant statistician who is a member of this methods group. Therefore, any proposals for funding of Campbell Collaboration reviews should include resources for dedicated methodological

i. Workshops

Methods groups will be expected to organize and conduct workshops related to their topic for presentation at Campbell Collaboration main meetings and other sites.

C. Conducting empirical studies

Methods groups should have a research agenda that reflects the kinds of advice, training, and support they are expected to provide. They should facilitate and support needed empirical methodological studies.

Unfortunately, empirical evidence is often lacking for methodological issues. Therefore, methods groups must also be prepared to provide consensual judgements about methodological decisions. In addition to drawing on the expertise of members of the group, this can be done by consulting with others. Methods groups are also expected to maintain a bibliography of relevant methodological articles.

D. Monitoring the quality of reviews

Methods groups can assist in monitoring the quality of Campbell reviews through the preparation of peer commentaries and/or through studies of the characteristics of Campbell reviews.

E. Serving as a forum for discussion

Methods groups are likely to use a variety of ways to communicate with their members. These include active email discussion lists, regular email, mail, phone conversations, face-to-face meetings, videoconference and/or webcasting. In doing so, methods groups are encouraged to maintain contact with the Dissemination Group in considering strategy and tactics on communication.

If possible, methods groups should conduct annual surveys of their members in order to maintain regular contact and to keep their details up-to-date.

As well as organizing training workshops at the Campbell Collaboration main meetings, some groups might also use meetings as an opportunity for members of the group to meet. In addition, because the pressure of other activities at meetings make it difficult to arrange meetings that last more than a few hours, methods groups might arrange longer meetings at other times to discuss specific issues in sufficient detail.

Other forums for group discussion include newsletters, email and listserves.

VIII. Functions of the Campbell Methods Coordinating Group

The Campbell Methods Coordinating Group shall be composed of one convenor from each registered methods group and shall be chaired by the methods group representative to the Campbell Steering Committee. The Campbell Methods Coordinating group shall be responsible for:

- facilitating communication among methods groups
- responding to expressions of interest in forming new methods groups
- serving as a conduit to the Steering Group for applications to register methods groups
- facilitating the development and maintenance of modules for methods groups

- facilitating systematic reviews of empirical methodological studies
- acting as liaison with those centers and individuals within the Cochrane Collaboration who serve a similar function within that organization
- helping to identify and implement new technologies that enhance review methodology

Two specific aspects of this coordination are:

- the production of an annual newsletter for methods groups
- the convening of an annual meeting of all convenors of methods groups at each main meeting.

IX. Joint Cochrane-Campbell Methods Groups

Joint Cochrane-Campbell methods groups facilitate a combined effort to produce guidelines for the preparation and maintenance of systematic reviews. They also provide for a combined effort on the preparation of the software needed to prepare, maintain, and disseminate reviews. In addition, there will be many areas of methodological interest in research synthesis that are not confined within the boundaries of one Collaboration or the other.

In areas of shared interest between the Campbell and Cochrane Collaborations, the establishment of joint Cochrane-Campbell methods groups is preferable to separate Cochrane and Campbell methods groups. This helps avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, maximizes the output of the methods groups, and facilitates learning from each other.

Cochrane methods groups are responsible for maintaining a register of studies related to the methodology of research synthesis (the *Cochrane Methodology Register*) and for compiling the modules of systematic reviews of these studies (the *Cochrane Database of Methodology Reviews*, to be published in *The Cochrane Library* from 2001). This work is not restricted to research synthesis within health care. Maintenance of these databases also provides an important opportunity for joint responsibilities between the two Collaborations.

Formal establishment of joint Cochrane-Campbell methods groups. For existing Cochrane methods groups, joint registration is based on consideration of (1) a registration application to the Campbell Collaboration Steering Group, and (2) a request to change the group's scope made to the Registration Subgroup of the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group. For existing Campbell methods groups, joint registration is based on consideration of (1) a registration application to the Cochrane Collaboration Registration Subgroup, and (2) a request to change the group's scope made to the Campbell Collaboration Steering Group.

For areas of interest where there is not yet a registered methods group within either Collaboration, the registration process is based on separate consideration of an application to the Campbell Collaboration Steering Group and to the Registration Subgroup of the Cochrane Collaboration Steering Group. To become a joint Cochrane-Campbell methods group, the proposers

would need to satisfy both sides of this registration process. However, if they were unable to satisfy one side of this process, it would not prevent them from registering as a methods group with the other.

It is acceptable for joint groups to place different emphases on their roles within the two Collaborations, since this will be determined by their membership and by the relative importance to each of the Collaborations of their areas of methodological interest. Similarly, their recommendations to the two Collaborations concerning certain methodological issues may differ. This would also be acceptable, since such recommendations need to be specific to the question being addressed and the questions tackled by the Collaborations will sometimes differ.

The number and affiliation of the convenors of a joint methods group should reflect the scope and interests of the group and its members. The monitoring of the performance of the joint methods groups is done separately by the two Collaborations. It is the responsibility of each joint methods group to determine how they should be represented within the two Collaborations (for example, at Colloquia).

X Working Committee

Cooper, Harris
210 McAlester Hall
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, MO 65211
Bus: (573) 882-3360
Bus Fax: (573) 882-7710
E-mail: Cooper, Harris M.

Hedges, Larry
5835 Kimbark Avenue
University of Chicago
Chicago, IL 60637
Bus: (773) 702-1589
Bus Fax: (773) 702-0248
E-mail: hedge@cicero.spc.uchicago.edu

Myers, David
Mathematica Policy Research
600 Maryland Ave SW
Suite 550
Washington DC 20024
Bus: (202) 484-9220
E-mail: dmyers@mathematica-mpr.com

Popay, Jennie
Professor of Sociology and Health Policy
Nuffield Institute for Health
Fairburn House

71-75 Clarendon Road
Leeds LS29PL
England
Bus: 0113 233 6983 direct
Reception: 0113 233 6633
E-mail: hssjmp@hyde1.leeds.ac.uk