Steps in Proposing, Preparing, Submitting, and Editing
Of Campbell Collaboration Systematic Reviews
Revision - Coordinating Chairs, February 2007
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The attached "Flow Chart of Steps in Conducting a Campbell Review" outlines the process whereby a Campbell systematic review is produced from an initial idea through to its completion.

Types of C2 Systematic Review

Topics for C2 reviews may be commissioned, invited or they may be submitted unsolicited.

Commissioned, reviews are undertaken on behalf of a client under the terms and conditions of a formal contact. Normally they will include an agreed timetable, milestone products, and a final delivery date.

Invitational reviews are illustrated by the Crime & Justice Coordinating Committee's solicitation of reviews from experts on selected topics. The topics for possible reviews were identified by members of the Crime & Justice Coordinating Committee, its larger advisory group, and with counsel from other collaborators.

Unsolicited submissions occur when researchers develop an idea for a review and submit it to the relevant C2 Coordinating Committee for reaction. The potential review authors know a particular topic well and are interested in capitalizing on the substantive and methodological expertise of C2 advisors and wish to contribute to the C2 database of systematic reviews.

All three types of C2 systematic reviews should also have an agreed topic, a business plan (including project management details, budget and timelines), and a scientific protocol.

C2 Systematic Reviews As Team Projects

Systematic reviews should not be conducted by single reviewers, and review teams should always have relevant expertise, including statistical and information specialist expertise. Reviews conducted by single authors are more prone to bias and error than those conducted by multiple reviewers. Multiple reviewers provide essential reliability checks on important aspects of systematic reviews, such as study identification, appropriate literature searching, document retrieval, critical appraisal, data extraction and data entry. Review teams that combine content expertise with searching, methodology and statistical expertise clearly have additional strengths to those lacking these inputs.

The Steps in Producing C2 Systematic Reviews

Step 1. Selecting a Topic

The first step in the creation of a C2 systematic review involves selecting a topic. Potential clients, end-users, C2 review authors, or C2 Coordinating Groups identify social interventions at the policy or practice level, or social issues where there is a need to determine the adequacy of information and identify the effectiveness of alternate policy or practice responses.

Step 2. Title Registration

The Title Registration form asks the review team to specify the review question. It asks for basic information about the problem, the target population, characteristics of the intervention, the expected outcome measures to be assessed, and the planned completion date of the protocol and review. A provisional project management plan, with realistic milestones and timelines, also needs to be included.

The Title Registration Form should be submitted to the relevant substantive C2 Coordinating Group (i.e. education, crime and justice, social welfare). The Editor of the relevant C2 Coordinating Group determines:

(a) Whether the topic overlaps with any reviews already in progress,
(b) Whether the review team has the necessary expertise, capacity and resources to conduct the review, and
(c) Whether the review question is specific and answerable.

If similar work within C2 exists, or is underway, the Editor puts the inquirers in contact with the review team doing the work.

If the Title Registration Form meets the above criteria the Editor registers the title with the C2 Executive Group and informs the potential review authors to proceed with the development of the protocol. The protocol title is published in the Titles List in C2-RIPE.

Step 3. Establishing an Editorial Team

The Editor establishes an editorial team for the protocol and review. An editorial team should consist of at least: two external substantive referees, a potential end-user of the review, an information specialist adviser, and a statistical/methods adviser. The latter may include an economics adviser and/or a qualitative research adviser and/or a social ethics adviser, depending on the nature of the review question. The statistical/methods adviser should be selected in collaboration with the Co-Chairs of the C2 Methods Group. With the assistance of the editorial team the systematic review authors can begin the development of the review protocol.

Step 4. Developing a Scientific Protocol and Project Management Plan

Requiring detailed protocols to be prepared is essential for:

(a) Allowing the Editor and editorial team to provide guidance and advice,
(b) Preventing problems from occurring during assessment of the quality of the draft review,
(c) Ensuring that final products will meet the scientific standards of the Campbell

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d) Providing a transparent account of how the systematic review will be undertaken.

Preparing a review is a complex process that comprises many judgments and decisions. As in any scientific endeavor, the methods and procedures to be used should be established beforehand, although these will evolve to some extent during the course of the project. A project management plan with allocated tasks, timelines, milestones, deliverables and a provisional full-cost budget, should accompany the scientific protocol.

Review protocols describe the topic and planned methodology for the review. Potential authors are advised to follow the "Campbell Collaboration Guidelines for the Preparation of Review Protocols (Version 1.0)." (available at: http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/MG/protguide.pdf)
A protocol for a Campbell review should consist of the following sections (see www.campbellcollaboration.org/MG/protguide.pdf for the complete protocol guidelines and examples of protocol contents.):

1. Cover Sheet, including the Review Title
2. Background for the Review
3. Objectives of the Review
3A. The Review Question (PICO)
4. Methods
    - Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review
    - Search strategy for identification of relevant studies
    - Criteria for determination of independent findings
    - Details of study coding categories
    - Statistical procedures and conventions
    - Treatment of qualitative data
5. Timeframe (proposed submission date of protocol and explicit dates for the planned completion of each stage of the review should be given)
6. Plans for Updating the Review
7. Acknowledgements
8. Statement Concerning Conflict of Interest
9. References
10. Tables

After the protocol is drafted, it is examined by the Editor and reviewed by the editorial team. Initial feedback to review authors from the editorial team should be completed within four weeks of receipt of the protocol. Subsequent feedback on the next iteration should be made within four weeks of receipt of the revised protocol. If no agreement between authors and the editorial team can be made after two iterations, a teleconference should be organized. If there is no agreement after the teleconference the protocol should be rejected.

During the protocol phase Editors should work with Managing Editors to keep the authors and external referees unaware of each other's identity. Anonymous critiquing of protocols is an attempt to make the review process as unbiased as possible, while maintaining a practical perspective.

Once the protocol is approved by the Editor, it is published in the Campbell Collaboration Reviews of Intervention and Policy Effectiveness Register (C2-RIPE). C2-RIPE is public and may be linked to other sites that target people who are users of C2 reviews. C2-RIPE will include comments on the review's contents.

Potential end-users of the Campbell Collaboration should be encouraged by the Editor to comment on protocols from the outset and throughout the development of C2 systematic reviews. Their input can be used to further refine the searching and reviewing strategies, as well as the review's methods.

Step 5. Undertaking the Systematic Review.

The systematic review should be undertaken according to procedures and stages agreed in the review's protocol. The project plan for the review, with explicit dates for the planned completion of each stage of the review should be adhered to. Delays at any stage should be reported to the Editor who should discuss with the Executive Director what steps might be necessary to get the timeliness of the review back on track.

Upon completion, the draft review should be submitted to the Editor. The assigned editorial team anonymously critiques the first draft with the aim of getting feedback to the author(s) within four weeks of receipt of the manuscript. Subsequent feedback on the next iteration should be made within four weeks of receipt of the revised review. If no agreement between authors and the editorial team can be made after two iterations, a teleconference should be organized. If there is no agreement after the teleconference the review should be rejected.

Step 6 – Publishing the Review

The Editor submits the completed review to the relevant C2 Coordinating Group Co-Chairs. The Coordinating Group Editor registers the review and passes it on to the C2 Executive Group, who will arrange for the completed review to be posted in C2-RIPE. The C2 Steering Group will be informed about the completion of the review and it's posting in C2-RIPE.

All C2 systematic reviews must have a one-page summary at the front of the review, written in non-technical language and identifying the key findings of the review. These front-page summaries should be written jointly by the authors of the review, representatives of the C2 Users' Group, and someone from the C2 Executive Group. Additional ways of disseminating the systematic review in different formats for different audiences is also the responsibility of these three entities.