



Campbell Collaboration Guidance for establishing and managing a Stakeholder Advisor Review Group¹

Involving stakeholders in systematic reviews of relevance to them will benefit both the review authors as well as the intended end-users of a review. Further, systematic reviews are likely to be more relevant and more often used in decision-making if end-user stakeholders are continuously involved in the systematic review process (Ross 2004; Thomas, 2004; NHS CRD, 2001). The identification and involvement of a Stakeholder Advisor Review Group (SARG) in all steps of the systematic review process can facilitate the following:

- focusing on and refining questions in a systematic review that address current needs of stakeholders in a particular topical area,
- assisting the author team in making decisions in the systematic review process such as inclusion/exclusion criteria in order to maintain relevance to the stakeholder audience,
- identifying and describing the results of reviews that are most important to end-user groups,
- collaborating in developing user-friendly, plain language, written summaries to describe what was learned from a systematic review for stakeholder audiences, and
- assisting in developing and conducting a knowledge translation strategy that is most likely to reach stakeholder audiences that have a need for the systematic review's findings.

C2 encourages systematic review authors to consider utilizing a SARG as a contributive element of their development process though it is not a requirement. The following information provides helpful guidance interested in organizing and managing a SARG.

What is the role of a Stakeholder Advisor Review Group?

A **Stakeholder Advisor Review Group (SARG)** should be established during the initial stages of review scoping. SARGs are established to help reviewers determine the parameters of their proposed review and help ensure that the final review is relevant useful and used for informing policy and practice. The SARG role involves three main functions:

- 1) Provide inputs on the proposed review scope, highlighting key policy and practice questions which the review should aim to inform. They *may* be able to direct review teams to additional studies and/or to provide background information on the topic, particularly within the context of their local situation;
- 2) Act as 'champions' for the review to promote interest and demand for the findings of the review from the outset. This could include promoting the review among their network, for instance by disseminating the protocol, distributing the final review or facilitating presentations of the review findings at events. They may also act as knowledge brokers between the research and policy/practice communities.
- 3) Provide guidance on the review team's policy engagement strategy. This would include advising the review team from the start about actors with whom they should connect to

¹ This document has been developed based on the guidance developed by the Cochrane Health Promotion and Public Health Field. The Campbell Collaboration is grateful for the permission to draw on the existing guideline document.



establish interest in the project; assist in identifying opportunities to influence policy or practice, or events where the review should be presented. The SARG may also assist with drawing out the policy implications (including lessons for practice and programme design) once the review is completed.

Examples of opinions sought from the SARG:

- Does the review question seem to capture the essence of the topic under review (will it sound interesting and useful to its target audience)?
- What interventions should be included in the review? How should they be defined?
- Which populations should be included in the review and which should be excluded?
- Are there specific sub-groups of interest which should be investigated in the review (e.g.: by income group, gender or ethnicity)?
- Are the needs of low and middle income countries adequately considered in the review?
- What types of outcomes should the review include?
- What information is useful for assisting users to assess applicability to their context?
- Who are the main decision-makers, influencers, practitioners and other key actors that could be interested in the review and its findings? How can the review authors access and build trust with these actors?

Advisory groups are *not* intended to be another layer of peer-review. The C2 editorial process remains independent of the SARG and final approval of manuscripts rest with the C2 Editors-in-Chief. Authors should conduct their review with scientific independence and integrity, avoiding any influence from the advisory group on review findings.

Who should the members of the advisory group be?

The primary focus of the SARG should be to provide content-related support, highlighting what end users of the review will want to have included in the review and promote early and ongoing engagement with the policy and practice audience of the review. Membership of the SARG should be inclusive of people from different parts of the world, to ensure the end review has relevance globally. The members of your advisory group will vary depending on your review question. However, it may be useful to consider members in the following categories:

- Policymakers and influencers (from aid agencies, development banks and major NGOs, and from governments)
- Beneficiaries from programmes being reviewed (when possible)
- Practitioners (those implementing the interventions under review)
- Knowledge translators and intermediaries between producers and users.
- Content and/or methods experts

The review team should ensure that members of the SARG have *demonstrated* knowledge, skills and experience in the roles they are asked to undertake.

Experience by Effective Public Health Practice Project in Canada suggests six members is an appropriate size for the SARG. Reviews will often have a global audience of policy-makers,



practitioners and academics, and for some topic areas it might be appropriate with a slightly larger group to allow representation from major actors, but we do not recommend this to be more than ten.

How do I establish a SARG?

C2 may be able to assist in suggesting potential candidates for the SARG, but the lead author or her/his designee has primary responsibility for establishing and coordinating the advisory group.

It is important that the review team has set up tasks or terms of reference for the advisory group prior to making contact with potential members. This will ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated from the outset.

When making the initial contact with potential members of your advisory group you should provide adequate details about the review, including proposed title, scope and authors. They also may need information about the Campbell Collaboration and the review process. Your Coordinating Group can provide some examples of documents you can draw on for this.

The major contribution of the advisory group will likely be in establishing the scope of the review and ensuring policy relevance and champions committed to the importance of the SR, findings and uptake of them into use. We strongly recommend that authors establish the advisory group and have the first meeting *before* the title registration form is submitted to the relevant Coordinating Group.

How to get the most out of your advisory group?

To ensure that your SARG works effectively it is important that you establish roles and responsibilities. We suggest that you consider the following issues and communicate this information early in the process:

- What is the role of each SARG member and which tasks do you want them to complete?
- What method of communication will be used and how frequently will the advisory group members be consulted?
- What workload is involved?
- Are there timelines that need to be considered?
- When does the work of the advisory group end?
- How will advice be managed and what will happen if conflicting advice (or that quite contrary to the reviewer's beliefs) is offered?

The ideal candidates for your advisory group are also likely to be busy people, so preparing for and facilitating their engagement is likely to be important. Some practical suggestions:

- Agree timelines and dates for consultations well in advance, and be aware that you are unlikely to be able to request more than 1 to 2 days in total over the course of the review from unpaid members.
- Provide necessary background documents before any meetings. This can include draft title, protocol and review reports.
- Prepare an agenda for meetings, highlighting key issues and decisions you'd like the advisory group to consider.



- If the SARG is providing feedback in writing, provide guidance on particular key issues you'd like the advisory group to consider.
- For organisations with high staff turn-over, such as central government agencies, it may be useful to discuss a hand-over plan in advance with advisory group members.



References

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Appendix 1: Terms of reference SARG

Authors of systematic reviews establish stakeholder advisor review groups to help them determine the parameters of their proposed review and to provide inputs throughout the review process to help ensure that the final review is policy relevant and has an audience of policy and practice actors that understand the review and that are interested in using the findings.

Members of the advisory group can be policymakers, practitioners, influencers, researchers, and other stakeholders with an interest in the review. Members of the advisory group will be asked to provide inputs on various aspects of the review throughout the review process. The total time commitment is not likely to exceed two days.

The tasks of the advisory group members may include:

- Advice on key decisions regarding the scope of the review, including refining the review question and definitions of key concepts
- Determine important outcomes
- Suggest relevant background literature and studies for inclusion
- Participate in up to 3 teleconferences for the duration of the review (title/ scoping stage; draft protocol; draft review)
- Provide written comments on draft protocol and draft review
- Help the team draw the policy implications from the review findings. This can involve participating in a brainstorm/focus group meeting to review the lessons and implications of the review in terms of policy and practice.
- Assist the study team with policy engagement. This can involve advising the team on key stakeholders with whom to communicate to build interest in and understanding of the review, contribute to developing a communication and uptake plan, facilitate engagement with key audiences and communicate findings.