**Introduction to MEC2IR:  
Guidance for Campbell Systematic Reviews**

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John Westbrook: Hello and welcome to today’s webcast being brought to you by the Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research at SEDL through the funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research in the U.S. Department of Education. This is John Westbrook, Director of the Center and also Co-Chair of the Knowledge Translation and Implementation Coordinating Group of The Campbell Collaboration.

We are delighted to bring today’s webcast to you featuring the work and resources of the Methods Coordinating Group of The Campbell Collaboration or C2 as it’s often referred to. I know you will find it very useful, and I thank this group very much for planning such an informative webcast for us. Okay, so without further ado, I will turn it over to Dr. Ariel Aloe, Co-Chair of the C2 Methods Group. Ariel?

Ariel Aloe: Hello. It’s a pleasure to introduce our editorial board, which includes Terri Pigott, Emily Tanner-Smith, and Josh Polanin. Terri and Emily are our Editors, and Josh is our Managing Editor. Today they are going to speak about the methodological expectations for Campbell Interventions Reviews. Let’s hear from them now.

Terri Pigott: This is Terri Pigott. What is the Campbell Collaboration Methods Coordinating Group? Who’s involved? Well, here we have a bunch of pictures of people that are involved in our Campbell Methods Group. We have two co-chairs. We have an editorial team consisting of a managing editor and two co-editors. We have a number of chairs of our subgroups, which I will talk about in a minute, and we also have an Advisory Board.

So, what does the Methodological Group of Campbell do? We support the production of Campbell systematic reviews. We provide methods, peer reviewing and editing for all protocols and reviews that come through to Campbell Collaboration. We also are all involved in research to improve the methodology of research synthesis and meta-analysis. We are also involved in disseminating guidelines for state of the art review methods.

We have several subgroups, as I mentioned earlier, that provide advice and guidance on specific methodological topics. These subgroups include one on economics, one on equity, specifically equity methods to encourage review authors to discuss the impact of interventions and reducing inequality of opportunity. We also have a group involved in information retrieval; how to find studies for systematic review. We have a group entitled Process Implementation looking at how to include methods about the implementation of an intervention into a Campbell review. We have a Methods Group on statistical methods, and we also have a subgroup that provides training in statistical methods for meta-analysis and also for other aspects of a systematic review from information retrieval through data analysis.

What kinds of things can we provide you with? The Methods Group provides consultation on these specific review methods. As I mentioned before: information retrieval, what kinds of studies, how to find studies for your review, study coding, how to extract information from studies, the assessment of research quality of the studies that are included in a review, how to calculate effect sizes for systematic review, and then again, how to analyze those and how to synthesize them across studies. We also provide consultation on the kinds of research designs that would be appropriate for your question in a Campbell review, methods on how to incorporate economic information in a review, and also methods and process implementation and data. We also maintain a resource center as part of our purview as the Methods Group. For example, we have tools there to help you complete a systematic review such as the effect size calculator. We also provide review guidelines. We produce a number of policy documents on specific issues that you might run into in a systematic review. We also have useful links in our resource center to other resources that are useful in thinking about completing a systematic review such as the Equator Network. We also provide policy briefs, again, on specific issues that you might run into in a systematic review. We also plan to update our resource center by March 2015 so that it becomes more useful for everyone who is interested in completing a systematic review.

I am now going to turn it to Emily Tanner-Smith to talk about our methodological expectations.

E. Tanner-Smith: Thank you, Terri. So, I’d like to take this opportunity to now discuss briefly some recent documents that we’ve published on The Campbell Collaboration website outlining some Methodological Expectations for Campbell Collaboration Intervention Reviews. We’ll call these the MEC2IR Guidelines for the Conduct and Reporting of Intervention Reviews.

So really our MEC2IR Guidelines were adapted from The Cochrane Collaboration’s MECIR standards for the expectations for The Cochrane Collaboration Intervention Reviews. So Cochrane’s MECIR standards really were designed to provide clear and transparent standards for both the conduct and the reporting of systematic review protocols, as well as completed manuscripts. So the goal of the Cochrane MECIR standards really is to provide a resource for both authors and editors to make it clear what expectations are expected of them for the publishing of their protocols and systematic reviews. So really the goal of these expectations is to help make the publishing experience clear for authors, and also help streamline the editorial process.

So these methodological expectation guidelines really help to streamline the communications between editorial teams, author review teams, as well as the methodologists who are going to be reviewing the methods and the statistical analyses in the protocols and completed systematic reviews.

At The Campbell Collaboration we decided to adapt Cochrane’s MECIR standards to the MEC2IR standards to essentially take those existing standards and make some adaptations to account for the different methods that often will occur in Campbell Collaboration’s systematic reviews. So, essentially what we did here is again, we wanted to have clear and transparent methods for our review teams and our author teams to make it clear to them when their protocols and reviews come to the Methods Group for peer review that they know what standards they will be evaluated on for their research. So, again, the goal is to ensure consistency and transparency in the peer review process.

So for the process for developing these standards, we created a working group to work on the adaptation of the Cochrane MECIR standards and so we included representatives from all of The Campbell Collaboration Coordinating Groups and they’re listed on the slide, and I want to take a minute just to thank all of the participants in this working group who really worked tirelessly, and participated on many calls to reach consensus on all of the adaptations that we ultimately made on the MEC2IR Guidelines. Then finally, once the working group had reached consensus on the adaptations, that proposal for those MEC2IR Guidelines were distributed to the co-chairs of the Methods Coordinating Group, and then finally approved by The Campbell Collaboration’s Steering Group.

Some of you may be wondering what the primary differences are between the MECIR and the MEC2IR Guidelines, and I think it’s important to first highlight that really there are many similarities between the two documents, with the MECIR documents and the MEC2IR documents, because really the methodological expectations for Campbell Collaboration reviews are highly similar to those for Cochrane Collaboration reviews. So the few minor differences that you will see really do focus around kind of three key issues. First are issues of risk of bias assessments, as well as assessments of the methodological quality of the primary studies included in the protocols and reviews, and essentially the adaptations that we made here permit for a parallelity of methods for assessing risk of bias and methodological quality given the types of research studies that may be more common in Campbell Collaboration’s systematic reviews. Then finally you’ll notice some adaptations around the development and reporting of summary of findings tables, again, recognizing that many Campbell Collaboration reviews may include tens, if not hundreds, of studies, and so we have to account and add some additional flexibility there in reporting standards. Then finally, the remainder of the changes between the MECIR and the MEC2IR documents really are quite minor in terms of changing each of the individual items and the conduct in reporting standards from perhaps mandatory to highly desirable or vice-versa. But overall, the standards are very similar and so we only made slight modifications to allow for the wide range of methods that we see in Campbell Collaboration’s systematic reviews.

So I will now hand it over to Josh Polanin who can talk about how the MEC2IR standards will be developed and incorporated into the editorial process.

Josh Polanin: Thank you, Emily. I’m happy to be on the call. As Emily mentioned, my name is Josh Polanin, and I am the Managing Editor of the Methods Group. I’m going to talk briefly today about our expectations for Campbell editors and relatedly what we expect from our authors as well.

So, as we look at the MEC2IR expectations, one of the most important points to mention to begin with, is that the standards have been adopted as of October 1st and all the views moving forward and protocols must comply with the reporting standards. These need to be completed for all protocols that have not been accepted yet, and all reviews in publication. So if a team is working on a review currently, and the protocol has been accepted but the review has not as of October 1st, 2014, the review team needs to take the time to go through the MEC2IR Standards and Expectations, and make sure that the review complies with these expectations.

Now, incorporating these expectations into the review should be a fairly straightforward process. If you look at the expectations - download it from the website - you will see that they are listed fairly succinctly so that a review team can incorporate them. These are very helpful because they help to align the Campbell community across the coordinating groups. Oftentimes we’ll find that substantive backgrounds talk in a slightly different language even for similar aspects of the review process, and these expectations help to align all of us so that we’re all talking in a common language. This will also help not only across the groups, but also within the coordinating groups between the editor and the authors. If the editor and the authors communicate succinctly, the process will move much more smoothly. The editors may turn to the MEC2IR Guidelines and Expectations and recommend some changes in the reviews to the review team.

The goal of the guidelines and expectations are really to set forth a transparent set of expectations and guidelines for the review team as Emily said. In practice, we think that this really should help review teams know from the onset what they’re getting involved in. So we think that while the protocol in the review is being written, a review team can read and incorporate these expectations into the protocol. We’d also suggest that once the protocol and review has been written, a member of the review team use the MEC2IR Guidelines and Expectations and use it as a sort of checklist and go back to their written documents, and to make sure that everything that’s included in the MEC2IR Guidelines is also included in the protocol and review. This will help both the editorial process and the methodological reviews as we’ll be following a similar practice in the Methods Group and, therefore, doing this at the onset, will really help to speed the process and make sure that we’re all on the same page.

So now I think we’ll turn it over to Shawn, who will lead us through a bit of Q&A.

Shawn Grant: Thank you very much, Josh. My name is Shawn Grant, and I’m a coordinator for the Campbell webcast series. After these three great presentations, what I would like to do is make the session a bit interactive at the end, and we have a few questions for all of our presenters about the standards and expectations they presented in this webcast today. So my first question will be for Terri. I was wondering if Terri could let us know, what is the advantage of having a Methods Group for The Campbell Collaboration?

Terri Pigott: Thanks, Shawn. The key advantage of having a Methods Group for Campbell is that it ensures quality and consistency of reviews across The Campbell Collaboration. It is also a central place where we can provide expertise on the methodology, the conduct and reporting of a review, and we can also promote new methods for systematic reviews.

Shawn Grant: Perfect! Thank you, Terri. The second question, I would like to address to Josh. Josh, I was wondering if you could let us know how one can get involved in the Campbell Methods Group, if they’re interested in getting involved.

Josh Polanin: Thanks, Shawn. Great question. There are a couple of ways that you can actually get involved with the Methods Group. The first is you can email myself or one of the other members, and request to be added as a member or an affiliate. A member of the Methods Group has full voting rights in all of our upcoming elections and is often called upon in different situations as a reviewer or to be part of different subgroups. An affiliate is still aligned with the Methods Group but really only receives different news bulletins or different updates about what is going on. You can also request to be a peer reviewer. During the editorial process we ask for external method peer reviews on both our protocols and our completed reviews. You can send the request to me or to one of the other members of the Methods Group, and we’ll add you to our list of methodological experts as a peer reviewer. Finally, there’s a couple of other smaller ways that you can be involved. You can join a subgroup. As Terri mentioned at the top of this podcast, there are a number of different subgroups that we have affiliated with the Methods Group and we’re always looking for new members. You can also help write a new series of methods whitepapers on different policy aspects that we’ll be writing in the upcoming months. Finally, if you just like to hear about the news and information coming out of the Methods Group, you can request to join the Methods Listserv where you will receive our bi-annual newsletter, and this way you can keep up on everything that’s happening in the Methods Group.

Shawn Grant: Thanks, Josh. That’s perfect and we really hope that those listening to this webcast do take the opportunity to get involved. The next question I have is for Emily, and I was wondering if you could explain to us why Campbell decided to adapt the MECIR guidelines from Cochrane, and why we didn’t create our own from scratch. If you could address that, that’d be great.

E. Tanner-Smith: Thanks, Shawn. Yes. When the working group decided to begin adapting the Cochrane MECIR guidelines, essentially our ultimate goal was to highlight the fact that The Cochrane Collaboration and The Campbell Collaboration are sister organizations, and both organizations are dedicated to promoting and disseminating high quality systematic reviews and meta-analysis. So, really we share many methodological expectations for both the conduct and reporting of intervention reviews. Given that, and as I mentioned earlier in the webcast, really our methods overlap substantially. So, we felt in the working group that it was much more realistic and it made more sense to adapt the MECIR guidelines because again the majority of those guidelines are going to be perfectly aligned with both the Cochrane expectations and the Campbell expectations. So we felt it would also send to authors an important message that, again, we share common goals and methodological expectations, and indeed that’s why we have many review teams who seek to co-register their review products with both Cochrane and The Campbell Collaboration. So because of that, and also there’s no need to reinvent the wheel as they say, we wanted to adapt those guidelines that had already been developed and an extensive amount of work had been developed and put into that by The Cochrane Collaboration folks. So we’re really indebted to them for putting in all of that legwork at the beginning. So really that’s why we decided it made more sense for us just to tweak those MECIR Guidelines to make those slight modifications to change those expectations so that they would apply to all of The Campbell Collaboration reviews that we have in our library.

Shawn Grant: Thanks, Emily. That’s really great to know about the beneficial relationship that we have with Cochrane and the efficient use of resources within Campbell. The next question going back around the horn is to Josh, and I think as Managing Editor of the Methods Group you could best address these questions I’m sure we’d get from some authors which are: ‘Why should I use these new expectations?’ and ‘Won’t it add more time to the review process from the time it takes for my review to be published and disseminated?’

Josh Polanin: Yes, I think this a very important question, Shawn. I’ll address the first one – why should I use the MEC2IR Guidelines. I think the main thing that these expectations set forth is in the title. They are expectations that we have as a Methods Group and Campbell-wide for what the review teams should be putting forth in their reviews. In the past, we’ve relied on review team expertise or a few of our policy documents to help guide the review teams, but these expectations are listed in such a way that they can be read and applied in a much more straightforward manner. So, picking them up and downloading this document will really help with some of the more technical big and small aspects of the review process. So, that segues into the second question nicely. I think then at the onset while the expectations might look somewhat overwhelming to begin with, we do think that this will have a significant impact on the amount of time in the review process. That is because review teams will know what should be written in the protocol and the completed reviews, and what the Methods Group will be looking for. There are some great examples listed in the expectations, and we think that they’re written in such a way that with just a little bit more work upfront, the review process in the end will be significantly decreased because there won’t be a back and forth between the Methods Group or the editorial team and the authors.

Shawn Grant: Thanks, Josh. That’s certainly my experience with the expectations and guidelines like these. It really helps to ensure the rigor of the end product and can even sometimes make the process more efficient because the standards are clearer. So it’s very helpful to know. The next question is going around the horn back to Terri. Say I am not familiar with one of the items in the new expectations, whom should I contact with any questions I may have?

Terri Pigott: Thanks, Shawn. Well, your first point of contact should be someone on the editorial team, either the Managing Editor, Josh Polanin, or one of the Co-Editors, Emily Tanner-Smith, or myself, Terri Pigott. If we feel we need to get some other deeper expertise on some particular issue, we can certainly send you to someone else we think that could help you out with figuring out how to address that particular expectation.

Shawn Grant: Great. Yes. We certainly have a rich team with the Methods Group. There are many points of contact. If you go to their website, you should be able to find contact info for all the people that Terri just mentioned. I’m sure someone would be more than happy to help you out if you have any questions about MEC2IR. Final question of the webinar, the softball question to Emily as the answer’s on the slide, where can I find these new guidelines?

E. Tanner-Smith: All right, my favorite kind of question. Thanks, Shawn. Yes, definitely check out the website. On The Campbell Collaboration website, we have the MEC2IR Guidelines documents and so there you can find the two documents. One, which outlines the expectations for the conduct of Campbell Collaboration Intervention Reviews, and the second which will outline the expectations for the reporting of Campbell Collaboration Intervention Reviews. So we encourage all of our author teams and anyone interested in systematic reviewing or meta-analysis to download those documents and check them out today.

Shawn Grant: Great! Thanks, Emily, that’s very helpful, and thanks to all of our participants in today’s webcast. Building off what Emily just said, we’d love for you to get in touch not just about the new guidelines, but anything related to the collaboration in general. You’ll see there is a link there for letting us know, giving us some feedback on how this webcast was. If you’d like to get in touch about Campbell in general, there is our contact email address and of course you can visit our website or follow us on Twitter and Facebook for updates on what’s going on in The Collaboration. We thank you for joining us for this webcast today and we look forward to seeing you for the next one.

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