PROTOCOLS

Criteria

Protocols set out the plans for the conduct of CEE Systematic Reviews or Systematic Maps. They are a requirement of CEE registration and should be submitted in advance of conducting the review. Full details of the rationale and purpose of protocols and guidelines for their development can be found at www.environmentalevidence.org/Authors.htm.

IMPORTANT: COMMITMENT TO REGISTER AND PUBLISH WITH CEE. By publishing your protocol in this journal you are registering with CEE your intent to conduct, and submit to this journal for publication, a CEE Systematic Review/Map. Please confirm that you and your co-authors are aware of and agree with this commitment when you submit by using the following words in your covering letter – ‘The authors hereby submit our protocol for publication in Environmental Evidence. By doing so we register with CEE our intent to conduct and submit to this journal a full and original systematic review/map report for publication and archiving in the CEE library’.

Protocols should normally be no longer than 8000 words (including references but excluding appendices and additional files). The structure of protocols differs slightly for systematic reviews and maps as indicted below.

Specificities per section

Title page (Review or Map)

This should state the title of the article. The title should normally be the same or very similar to the review question, for example:

What is the effectiveness of intervention A in producing change in subject B?
What is the impact of factor X on subject Y?

The title should also indicate that it is either a systematic review or systematic map protocol, for example:
What is the effectiveness of intervention A in producing change in subject B? A systematic review protocol.
What is the impact of factor X on subject Y? A systematic map protocol.

The full names, institutional addresses, and email addresses for all authors must be included on the title page. The corresponding author should also be indicated.

Abstract (Review or Map)

The abstract should not exceed 350 words and must be structured into separate sections: Background, the context and purpose of the review, including the review question; Methods, how the review will be conducted and the outputs that are expected.

Keywords (Review or Map)

Three to ten keywords representing the main content of the article should be given.

Background (Review or Map)

This section should be written in a way that is accessible to readers without specialist knowledge in that area and must clearly state - and, if helpful, illustrate - the background to the review and its aims. You should indicate why this study is necessary and what it aims to contribute to the field. The role of commissioners and other stakeholders in the formulation of the question should be described and explained. It should logically lead the reader to the primary question stated in the next section.

Objective of the Review (Review or Map)

You should describe the primary question and secondary questions when applicable. The primary question is the main question of the review and should be the same or very similar to the protocol title. The secondary questions are usually linked to possible subgroup analyses. This section may also present definitions of the primary question components (e.g. the subject, intervention and outcome measure) but see ‘study inclusion criteria’ below.

Methods (Review)

Searches

Here the proposed searches are described in sufficient detail so as to be repeatable. The following subsections are a guide to the detail required on what will be searched and how the search will be conducted.

- Search terms and languages
• Search strings and/or combinations of searches (search strings refer to combinations of terms using Boolean characters, combinations are methods used to set-up and pool different searches run separately).
• Estimating the comprehensiveness of the search
• Publication Databases to be searched (e.g. Web of Science)
• Internet searches to be conducted (e.g. Google Scholar)
• Specialist searches - Searches for grey literature: contacts, searches of organisational websites, use of specific search terms or strings, filtering or limitations.
• Supplementary searches such as Bibliographical searches and literature provided directly by stakeholders

Article Screening and Study inclusion criteria

Here provide explanation about the rationale you propose to include/exclude articles based on the following aspects, so that this stage is transparent and replicable by any external reader.

Screening process
• Title, abstract and full text screening methodology
• Test(s) for consistency of decision regarding inclusion/exclusion, at title, abstract, full-text level, planning other tests

Inclusion criteria
• Relevant subject(s)
• Relevant intervention(s)
• Relevant comparator(s) (if appropriate)
• Relevant outcomes
• Relevant types of study design

Please state clearly that you will provide a list of articles excluded at full text with reasons for exclusion.

Study quality assessment

Describe here the approach you propose to use to critically appraise and assess quality of included studies

Data extraction strategy

Describe here how you will collect and record outcome data and associated meta-data from included studies. How will the repeatability of this process be tested? Please state that your extracted data records will be made available as additional files.

Potential effect modifiers and reasons for heterogeneity
Provide a list of those effect modifiers to be considered in the review and details of how the list was compiled (including consultation of external experts). The list should not be exhaustive but a short list of those variables thought to be most important and amenable to analysis.

Data synthesis and presentation

Describe here the methods you might use to synthesise the collected data and any subsequent manipulation of the data set, sub-group analysis, sensitivity analysis and tests for bias. Narrative synthesis should always be attempted. Potential for meta-analysis (or alternative form of synthesis) should have been assessed and preferred methodology should be stated in sufficient detail for reviewers to comment.

Methods (Map)

Searches

Here the proposed searches are described in sufficient detail so as to be repeatable. The following subsections are a guide to the detail required on what will be searched and how the search will be conducted.

- Search terms and languages
- Search strings and/or combinations of searches (search strings refer to combinations of terms using Boolean characters, combinations are methods used to set-up and pool different searches run separately).
- Estimating the comprehensiveness of the search
- Publication Databases to be searched (e.g. Web of Science)
- Internet searches to be conducted (e.g. Google Scholar)
- Specialist searches - Searches for grey literature: contacts, searches of organisational websites, use of specific search terms or strings, filtering or limitations.
- Supplementary searches such as Bibliographical searches and literature provided directly by stakeholders

Article Screening and Study inclusion criteria

Here provide explanation about the rationale you propose to include/exclude articles based on the following aspects, so that this stage is transparent and replicable by any external reader.

Screening process

- Title, abstract and full text screening methodology
- Test(s) for consistency of decision regarding inclusion/exclusion, at title, abstract, full-text level, planning other tests
Inclusion criteria

- Relevant subject(s)
- Relevant intervention(s)
- Relevant comparator(s) (if appropriate)
- Relevant outcomes
- Relevant types of study design

Please state clearly that you will provide a list of articles excluded at full text with reasons for exclusion.

Study quality assessment

Describe here the approach you propose to use to critically appraise and assess quality of included studies. In systematic maps this is likely to be more limited than in systematic reviews.

Data Coding Strategy

Describe here the data that you intend to extract from each study and how they are to be recorded as an element of the map. How will the repeatability of this process be tested?

Study mapping and presentation

Describe here the methods you might use to map and present the collected studies and the data they contain. You should be explicit about the form in which you will make the map available.

Potential Conflicts of Interest and Sources of Support (Review or Map)

The independence of CEE Systematic Reviews and Maps is a high priority. Consequently, the potential competing interests of the Review Team should be transparent.

A competing interest exists when your interpretation of data or presentation of information may be influenced by your personal or financial relationship with other people or organizations. Authors must disclose any financial competing interests; they should also reveal any non-financial competing interests that may cause them embarrassment were they to become public after the publication of the manuscript.

Authors are required to complete a declaration of competing interests. All competing interests that are declared will be listed at the end of published articles. Where an author gives no competing interests, the listing will read 'The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests'. When completing your declaration, please consider the following questions:

Financial competing interests
In the past five years have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this
manuscript, either now or in the future? Is such an organization financing this manuscript (including the article-processing charge)? If so, please specify.

Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organization that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future? If so, please specify.

Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript? Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript? If so, please specify.

Do you have any other financial competing interests? If so, please specify.

**Non-financial competing interests**

Are there any non-financial competing interests (political, personal, religious, ideological, academic, intellectual, commercial or any other) to declare in relation to this manuscript? If so, please specify.

**References**

See general instructions