Campbell International Development Coordinating Group (IDCG) conflict of interest guidance

This document provides guidance for resolving any real or perceived conflict of interest arising in the work of the Campbell International Development Coordinating group (the Group hereafter). The policy draws on the Campbell Collaboration statement concerning conflict of interest (Campbell Protocol Guidelines, 2001), the Cochrane Collaboration statement on declaration of interest and commercial support (Cochrane Handbook, Chapter 2.6), and inputs from a consultation exercise with relevant stakeholders. The Group aims to promote best practice at all times and welcomes suggestions for improvements in the policy content and wording.

A template declaration form for authors, contact editors and peer-reviewers is provided in Annex I. Lead authors and contact editors are required to complete the declaration form before publication of the Title Registration Form (TRF) in the Campbell library. Subject peer-reviewers will also be required to complete the declaration before their involvement at the relevant stage (protocol or review).

The Campbell Collaboration International Development Coordinating Group statement concerning conflict of interest

The Campbell Collaboration welcomes funding for systematic reviews as a contribution towards improving the evidence base for policy and practice. Both public and private funding must however accept the independence of the research team and of the Collaboration’s editorial process. In order to safeguard independence, a funding body is not permitted to delay or prevent publication of a review registered with the Collaboration. A funding body may not interfere with the independence of the authors of reviews in regard to the conduct of their reviews.

Campbell Systematic Reviews should be free of any real or perceived bias introduced by the receipt of any benefit in cash or kind, any hospitality, or any subsidy derived from any source that may have or be perceived to have an interest in the outcome of the review. There should be a clear barrier between the production of Campbell reviews and any funding from commercial sources with financial interests in the conclusions of Campbell reviews. Thus, sponsorship of a Campbell review by any commercial source or sources is prohibited. Regarding engagement with public sector and non-profit bodies, the Group broadly distinguishes two different types of funder:

1) Implementing agencies defined as any governmental or non-governmental body funding or responsible for implementation of an intervention of the type under review. Reviews which are both directly funded and managed by a relevant implementing agency are not eligible for registration with IDCG. Funding from such agencies is acceptable provided management of the peer
review process remains independent of the implementing agency, such as by being mediated by an agency of good repute such as the EPPI-centre, or IDCG.

2) Research agencies of good repute who may or may not be involved in funding primary research on, but are not otherwise involved in funding or implementation of, an intervention of the type under review. Reviews which are funded and/or managed by research agencies are eligible for registration with IDCG.

A separate guidance document sets out IDCG’s procedures for engaging with funders to ensure the independence of the peer review process.

Reviewer authors:

Reviewer authors should disclose any conflict of interest capable of influencing their judgments, including personal, political, academic, and other possible conflicts, as well as financial conflicts. It is impossible to abolish conflict of interest, since the only person who does not have some vested interest in a subject is somebody who knows nothing about it. Financial conflicts of interest cause the most concern. They can and should be avoided, but must be reported if there are any. If an author is involved in a study included in his/her review, this must be acknowledged in the review, as it could be perceived as a potential conflict of interest. Any secondary interest (such as personal conflicts) that might unduly influence judgments made in a review (concerning, for example, the inclusion or exclusion of studies, assessments of the validity of included studies or the interpretation of results) should also be reported in the review.

Receipt of benefits from any source with financial interests in the conclusions of the Group’s reviews must be acknowledged and conflicts of interest must be disclosed in the Campbell Library of Systematic Reviews and other publications that emanate from The Campbell Collaboration. The protocol for a review registered with the Group should specifically mention that a sponsor cannot prevent certain outcome measures being assessed in the review. Where an implementing agency is the funder of a review, a copy of the funding agreement should be attached as an annex to the TRF.

Disclosing a conflict of interest does not necessarily reduce the worth of a review and it does not imply dishonesty. However, conflicts of interest can influence judgments in subtle ways. Reviewers should include statements in their protocol and review about potential conflicts even when they are confident that their judgments will not be influenced. Editors may decide that disclosure is not warranted or they may decide that readers should know about such a conflict of interest so that they can make up their own minds about how important it is. Decisions about whether or not to publish such information should be made jointly by review authors and editors.
Editors and peer-reviewers:

The editorial team and all peer-reviewers must disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest capable of influencing their editorial judgement, including (co-)authorship of the review, direct involvement in review funding, the existence of a publicly expressed or ‘known’ opinion about the review subject matter, and/or authorship of any of the studies included in the review.

For any single review, contact editors, managing editors and peer reviewers cannot be members of review author teams. In the particular case where a review is proposed by the Group’s entire editorial staff, the Group must ensure that independent editorial support is provided, for example by co-listing the review with another Campbell group or co-registering with a Cochrane group and ensuring that the co-listed/co-registered group takes editorial lead.

In the event that a review funded by 3ie falls within the remit of an editor who is an employee of 3ie, the following routines will apply. The group will consider whether to appoint an independent contact editor; this decision can be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the independent co-Chair. Should it decide to retain the editor who is employed by 3ie, a co-Chair independent of 3ie or a suitably qualified, independent substitute designated by the co-chair will review the editorial feedback in order to ensure that interests of authors and those of the Group are fairly and adequately represented.

Moreover, all IDCG reviews will also go through an independent review by the C2 Methods group.

All editorial and peer-reviewer conflicts of interest should be disclosed in a conflict of interest declaration form for editors and peer-reviewers. The declaration form must be filled out for any review registered with the Group, and its content can be accessed on request from the Group’s secretariat which is responsible for keeping a record of all disclosed conflicts of interest associated with the Group’s registered reviews. The co-Chairs of the Group will review and approve the conflict of interest declarations of authors and contact editors prior to title registration, and subject peer-reviewers for protocols and reports at the relevant stage.

All Advisory Board members and editorial base staff are required to declare conflicts of interest on an annual basis, and this information will be freely available on the IDCG website.

Arbitration process:

Any serious concerns relating to conflict of interest, defined as instances in which:

1) a proposal for undertaking a review raises a question of serious conflict of interest,
2) a disagreement arises between authors and editors as a result of editorial involvement in the review’s funding process
3) a disagreement arises between authors and editors as a result of editorial authorship of one of the included studies

should be sent to the IDCG’s independent arbiter committee. The referral can be initiated by the authors, the editors or both parties of the proposed review. The independent arbiter body shall consist of a sub-committee of the IDCG advisory board and shall comprise no member of the review team, the Group’s editorial team, member of staff of the review’s funding bodies, or of 3ie. Clear procedures for seeking arbitration are available via the IDCG website.
**Annex 1 IDCG Conflict of interest Declaration form**

Authors, editors and peer-reviewers should disclose any conflict of interest capable of influencing their judgments, including personal, political, academic, and other possible conflicts, as well as financial conflicts. It is impossible to abolish conflict of interest, since the only person who does not have some vested interest in a subject is somebody who knows nothing about it. Disclosing a conflict of interest does not necessarily reduce the worth of a review and it does not imply dishonesty. However, conflicts of interest can influence judgments in subtle ways. Any conflicts arising from financial, academic or personal sources that might unduly influence judgments made in a review should be reported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Review title</th>
<th>Involvement in review [delete as appropriate]</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Contact editor</th>
<th>Peer reviewer</th>
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Please answer the following questions:

1. Are you employed by an organisation that may have a vested interest (financial or otherwise) in the results or the conclusions of the review? YES/NO [delete as appropriate]

2. Have you been involved in the design, conduct, publication, or funding of a potentially eligible study for the review? YES/NO [delete as appropriate]

3. Do you have any other competing financial or other (personal, political, academic, or other) interests? YES/NO [delete as appropriate]  If YES, please specify:

If you have answered ‘YES’ to any of the questions above, you may have a competing interest which should be declared. Please draft a statement to publish with your review in the space below. This will be reviewed by the Lead author and IDCG editorial base staff for inclusion in your review.

Authors should not be concerned about answering ‘YES’ to any of the questions. ‘YES’ answers do not indicate good or bad, but are simply something to declare on this form and consider for inclusion in the Declarations section of the published review.

If you have answered ‘NO’ to all the above questions, please enter ‘None known’.

I/we confirm that any present or past affiliations or other involvement in any organisation or entity with an interest in the Review which might lead me/us to have a real or perceived conflict of interest are stated.

Signature(s):
Date: