

Criteria for systematic reviews



The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) has been created to enhance development effectiveness through the promotion of evidence-based policy-making. 3ie funds new studies of the impact of development interventions, and undertakes and funds reviews of existing studies (systematic reviews).

3ie-supported systematic reviews cover studies assessing the impact on any development-related theme. Reviews are restricted to interventions in low- and middle-income countries, though may also draw on evidence from developed countries on the basis of existing reviews for those countries. The 3ie [systematic reviews page](#) lists studies already completed and underway.

3ie is partnering with the [Campbell Collaboration \(C2\)](#) in the production of systematic reviews. All reviews should aim to register with C2 (or the Cochrane Collaboration, C1, if appropriate), with protocols and reviews submitted to C2 (or C1). Accordingly reviews must satisfy C2 criteria. 3ie's approach is also influenced by realist evaluation, which stresses the importance of recognizing how outcomes may vary by context and the underlying causal mechanisms at work. In practice this means: (1) setting the outcome review in the broader context of the underlying program theory, and reporting evidence on all assumptions and links in the causal chain, not only outcomes; and (2) examining the variation in reported outcomes, not only their mean. An example of this approach is Van der Knapp et al. (2008). Effectiveness syntheses should use evidence from high quality impact evaluation evidence (3ie, 2008),¹ while causal chain synthesis can draw on mixed methods, including qualitative data synthesis.

Grant applications are accepted through 3ie's online grant application system in response to a request for proposals. Grant applications are not accepted outside of these calls or via email. Annex 1 presents the review criteria.

3ie encourages proposals from developing countries researchers (defined as developing country nationals resident in that country), and proposals including such researchers in the study team.

The study outputs comprise: (1) a title registration and protocol for the study, subject to approval by 3ie and submitted to C2; (2) the final report subject to approval by 3ie and submitted to C2; (3) two short summaries, one suitable for a policy brief and a shorter one suitable for the 3ie systematic reviews database; and (4) list of all included studies in a format suitable to be included in 3ie's impact evaluation database.

Reference

3ie (2008) Principles for Impact Evaluation, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, New Delhi.

<http://www.3ieimpact.org/doc/principles%20for%20impact%20evaluation.pdf>

Van der Knaap, Leontien M., Frans L. Leeuw, Stefan Bogaerts and Laura T. J. Nijssen (2008)

Combining Campbell Standards and the Realist Evaluation Approach: The Best of Two Worlds?, *American Journal of Evaluation*.

<http://aje.sagepub.com/content/29/1/48.abstract>

¹ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_evaluation

Annex 1

Criteria for review of proposals to conduct systematic reviews

Term	Definition	Criteria
Qualifications of proposed staff (35%)	The skills and experience of the proposed team in the relevant research and policy area and in conducting systematic reviews	The PIs proposed to conduct the study should have the right mix of skills. Points are awarded for team members with relevant experience in the research and policy area, and previous experience in conducting systematic reviews
Quality of technical proposal (35%)	The proposal is for a high quality systematic review, which will use appropriate evidence to answer the research question(s) posed, and appropriate methods of search, critical appraisal, data collection and synthesis	Points are awarded for: (1) awareness and application of the procedures required to meet systematic review quality standards; (2) use of appropriate evidence to answer the research question; (3) recognising the importance of developing a review using appropriate techniques of search, critical appraisal, data collection and synthesis; (4) whether the proposal is appropriately motivated including relevant background, the question situated in relevant policy and practice and appropriate theory cited
Dissemination, budget and timeline (15%)	The proposed dissemination strategy, budget and timeline should be relevant	Points are awarded for: (1) the approach to involve stakeholders in user organisations; (2) appropriate budget and timeline for delivery (not exceeding 12 months)
Involvement of developing country researchers/evaluators (15%)	The extent to which developing country evaluators/researchers are involved in the proposed study. Developing country researchers are defined as developing country nationals resident in that country	Points are awarded for the substantive involvement of developing country researchers/evaluators in the study team. Higher points are awarded the more substantive the involvement of the developing country nationals