



STARR Decision Tool

Selecting Approaches for Rapid Reviews

Selecting Approaches for Rapid Reviews (STARR) Decision Tool

The purpose of the STARR decision tool is to guide the reviewer in selecting possible approaches to conducting their rapid review.

1. Interaction with commissioners

Ensure clear communication with rapid review commissioners (the person or group requesting the rapid review). It is important that there is a common understanding as to the purpose of the rapid review, the questions to be answered, how the review will be used and the trade-off between time and rapid review scope. This may be an iterative process throughout the rapid review. Points to consider:

- Rapid review focus: Why is the rapid review being commissioned? What is the primary decision question for the rapid review?
- Restricting the scope: Can the scope be limited e.g. by geographical context, setting, year of publication, type of study? (Theme 2 on understanding the evidence base may help here).
- Breadth versus depth: Would the commissioner prefer a brief overview of a wide range of studies or a more in-depth analysis of a smaller selection of relevant studies?

2. Understanding the evidence base

Assess the volume and type of evidence available. This will help inform discussions with commissioners about the rapid review scope, which rapid review methods are most appropriate and the feasibility of the rapid review in the given timescales. Points to consider:

- Volume and type of evidence: Have you considered the expected volume and type of evidence? Potentially useful options to determine this include:
 - Scoping searches (e.g. brief searches of bibliographic databases such as PubMed and non-bibliographic sources for grey literature)
 - Use of existing systematic reviews
 - Expert advice
- Final rapid review searches: Can the total number of citations to screen be reduced by narrowing the search, such as using fewer databases, applying focussed terms or search filters? What is an acceptable trade-off between volume of citations and impact on comprehensiveness?

3. Data extraction and synthesis methods

Consider presentation of evidence. The complexity of the evidence base should be taken into account and an assessment made as to how much data should be extracted and presented and in what format. Points to consider:

- Existing systematic reviews: Could existing reviews be used for any of the following? This may depend on their closeness to your review question, search dates, and methodological quality.
 - Undertaking a review of reviews
 - Extracting data from existing reviews, supplemented by a search for more recent studies (i.e. a review update)
 - Evidence tables from existing reviews used as a data extraction template
- Most important outcomes: What are the most important outcomes for the rapid review commissioners? Prioritisation of key outcomes may help ensure the rapid review is feasible within the timescales.
- Quality assessment: What approaches to quality assessment (method and reporting of the included studies in the rapid review) are feasible in the time available, if any?
- Synthesis approach: Do the data and timescales support the use of quantitative synthesis methods such as meta-analysis? If not, consider other methods to highlight key findings such as narrative synthesis. Also consider whether the data support qualitative or mixed methods synthesis.
- Data presentation: What is the most useful way to present the findings to the commissioner? What type of report is expected? Consider a brief narrative summary and the use of evidence tables and/or graphical representation of the evidence. It may be important to highlight the relevance of the evidence to the policy context and gaps in the evidence to inform future research.

4. Reporting of rapid review methods

Clearly report rapid review methods used. It is crucial that the reader understands what methods have been used and the impact this may have on the findings. Points to consider:

- Description of methods: Have you clearly reported and justified the rapid review methods used, highlighting differences from standard systematic review methods and enabling the rapid review to be updated if required in the future?
- Discussion of limitations: What are the potential limitations and biases of the chosen rapid review methods?

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