Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency, cost and value of contacting study authors in a systematic review: a case study and worked example.

Version: 0 Date: 04 May 2018

Reviewer: Cheryl Gibson

Reviewer's report:

This is an important article that extends the information about the effectiveness and value of contacting authors to gain needed information about a study that was not offered within the published article.

Just a few suggestions:

1. Value section. It would help readers to be provided examples of data not reported in the study that were deemed valuable. The authors state that if they identified data not reported in the study, it was determined as valuable. However, just because something was not included in the original article, it is not always "valuable." Please clarify and provide examples of particular responses deemed valuable.

2. Effectiveness and efficiency. More than a quarter of the articles were from the same authors (31 out of 119 studies; 26%). It seems that the efficiency of contacting authors would be increased significantly because you only had to contact a particular author once about multiple papers (e.g., one particular author answered questions about 4 different studies). Was one email sent to the author about his/her multiple studies? It seems the author's reply included information about all studies. Please clarify.

3. The authors achieved a 43% response rate overall to their email requests. It would be interesting to reveal what was stated in the email request. Did the study authors indicate how the information would be used, give a "due date," what was the subject line in the email request, did the email signature include the study author's name, title, email, phone number, university name and logo, for example. Not only have these particular details been shown to boost response rates to email requests, there is also wariness about opening emails from individuals who are not known to you. Please address.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
**Declaration of competing interests**

Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. 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?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license ([http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.