Author’s response to reviews

Title: Applying systematic review search methods to the grey literature: A case study examining guidelines for school-based breakfast programs in Canada

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Author’s response to reviews:

September 21, 2015

Dear Dr. Mcdaid.

I hope you are well. On behalf of my co-authors (Jackie Stapleton, Sharon Kirkpatrick, Rhona Hanning, and Scott Leatherdale), I would like to thank you once again for your prompt review of our revised manuscript entitled “Applying systematic review search methods to the grey literature: A case study examining guidelines for school-based breakfast programs in Canada”.

We have reviewed your constructive comments on the manuscript and included our responses below (denoted with **). The corresponding changes can be seen in track changes within the revised manuscript file.

Thank you for considering this manuscript for publication in Systematic Reviews. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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Editor's comments:

Thank-you for amending your paper in response to the helpful comments from the reviewers. There is still some further work to be done to make the paper as useful as possible for readers and before it is ready for publication.

**We appreciate the care you have taken in closely reviewing our manuscript. We feel the changes you have requested will result in a stronger and more helpful article for your readers.**

In particular it is still not clear which papers were identified by which strategies and which papers were identified from a single source and what the sources were – for example was any single source better than others. As requested by the second reviewer you need to provide a table of which studies were identified by each search strategy. This could be incorporated into your current table 2 – in particular the last two columns are of limited relevance to the main subject matter of your paper so these could be deleted to allow addition of the source information.

**We have deleted the last two columns of Table 2 and inserted two new columns indicating both the name and number of strategies used to identify each document. We have also indicated that the grey literature was the least useful for identifying publications for the review, since it only identified one record. The targeted web searching was the most comprehensive of all identification strategies.**

The results would flow much better if the second paragraph became the first paragraph (P11).

**We have made the requested revision.**

The addition of information on the time taken for the various activities in Figure 2 is potentially useful for readers. However, it is not clear how this information was collated – this needs to be added to the Methods. It would be helpful to add an additional column to Figure 2 of the number of records at each stage – I appreciate this is in figure 1 but would give context in Figure 2. Was the time taken for various activities undertaken prospectively or is this a retrospective guesstimate? If so the latter that needs added as a limitation to the discussion. Similarly the lack of a more detailed breakdown of time for various activities (as suggested by the second author) should be added as a limitation. This will inform others for future studies.

**We reported the amount of time spent on each identification and screening phase based on retrospective estimates. We have now made this explicit in the methods and listed this as a limitation. Further, we have added a column to Figure 2 that lists the number of records identified or screened in each phase of the review. We also advise readers to refer to Figure 1 for more detail on the information in this column. Please let us know if this information is clear.**
If you have any insights as to advantages/disadvantages of using Excel to manage your records that would also be interesting, for example how good was the remove duplicates function?

**We have recorded some of our insights on using Excel to manage our records in the discussion section. Advantages of Excel included the ability to export records from the grey literature databases directly into a spreadsheet and the ability to easily duplicate individual sheets on spreadsheets (making it useful to separate the different stages of screening), the remove duplicates feature, the ability to insert an extra column in Excel to input screening decisions (i.e., we assigned a numeric code for each reason for exclusions), and the ability to sort records easily (i.e., by screening decision code, organization name, etc.). Disadvantages included the inability to directly export from Google and the time spent switching between the web browser and Excel spreadsheet while recording record information and screening.

Some typos etc. that need addressed are as follows:

P5-6
“as well as meeting the requirements of the PROSPERO database” – I suggest removing this as the PROSPERO core data set is a bit different from the PRISMA reporting guidelines

**Revised as requested.

P8 Middle of para one
“that was it was identified through” – needs amended

**Revised as requested.

“larger folder” – do you mean “main folder”?

**Revised as requested.

P10 Final para
“The title and organisation of documents” – do you mean “source organisation”?

**Revised as requested.

P11 Results, first para
“were conducted in a two month period by the lead author consuming than most traditional reviews”. First, this does not make grammatical sense. Second, it is not clear what you mean by a traditional systematic review – you need to be very specific about what your comparison is. Your research did not involve a comparison of time to undertaken in different reviews so this is not really relevant in the results section.

**The original sentences in this section read “All components of the methodological search plan were conducted in a two-month period by the lead author (as shown in Figure 2). This timeframe is similar or even less time-consuming than most traditional systematic reviews…” We have removed the comparison to other types of reviews.

P11, Results, middle of first para
“11/15 or” should read “11/15 of”
** The sentence read “11/15 or 73.3% of the included publications.” We intended for ‘or’ to follow 11/15, since 11/15 = 73.3%. We can remove the percentage if you feel 11/15 will suffice.

P13, para2
“with the formatting” should read “due to the formatting”
**Revised as requested.

-- Please also take a moment to check our website at  for any additional comments that were saved as attachments. Please note that as Systematic Reviews has a policy of open peer review, you will be able to see the names of the reviewers.