

Cochrane Bias Methods Group strategy

Camilla Hansen, Doug Altman, Isabelle Boutron, Matthew Page, Asbjørn Hróbjartsson

Introduction

The Cochrane Bias Methods Group (BMG) was established in 2000. Its overall aim was – and is - to provide methodological guidance to Cochrane, produce inputs to the Cochrane Handbook, and to coordinate development of methods used in Cochrane reviews.

The BMG is comprised of four convenors, one group coordinator, and more than 200 members from across the world. The four convenors are: Doug Altman (UK), Isabelle Boutron (France), Asbjørn Hróbjartsson (Denmark), and Matthew Page (Australia). The BMG is hosted by Center for Evidence-Based Medicine at Odense University Hospital and University of Southern Denmark in Odense, Denmark. The BMG possesses relatively limited financial resources, but great intangible resources in the form of experiences and skills within methodological research among the convenors and members.

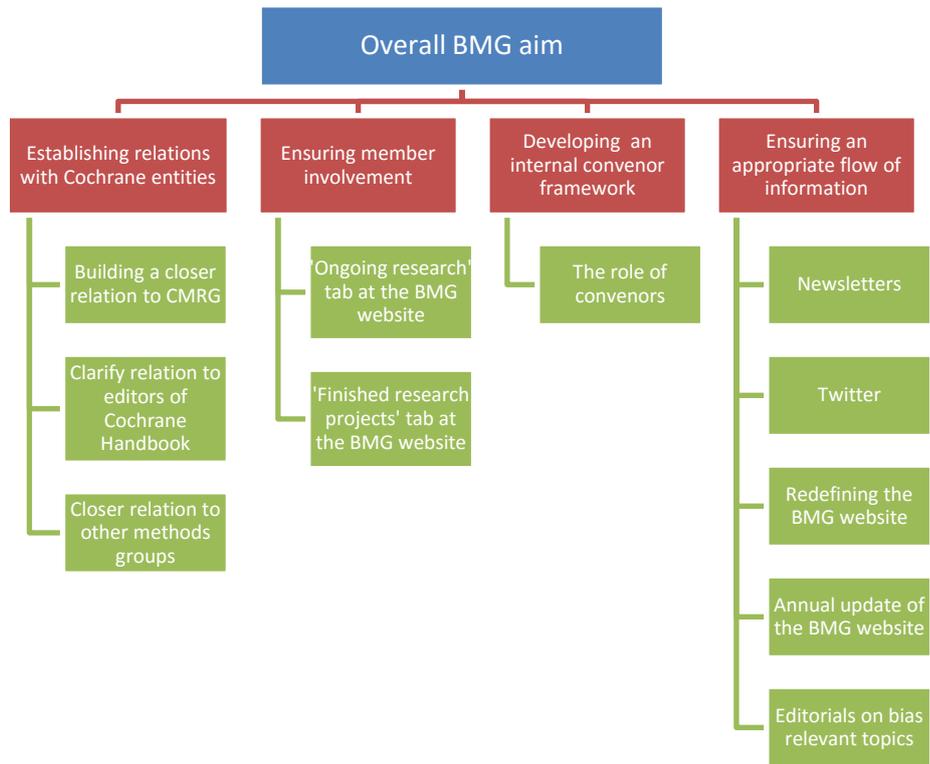
Objective

The primary aim of this explicit BMG strategy is to provide a tool for the BMG convenorship to ensure that the BMG fulfils its aim and its capacity for adapting to a changing environment. We have for some time managed well on an implicit ad-hoc strategy, but we might benefit further by an explicit reflection on strategic aims, themes, and resources. The overall strategic aim for the BMG is that it is an active and visible group with an ability to adapt to a changing Cochrane organisation and a changing publication environment for systematic reviews.

Strategy content

The strategy defines four main themes (figure 1):

Figure 1: The BMG Strategy



The figure shows the overall aim, main themes, and actions included in the strategy

The main themes and suggested actions are described in more details below.

Theme 1: Establishing relations with Cochrane entities

Within Cochrane, the BMG is a well-established methods group. In order to build on this favourable position, the BMG must ensure visibility internally in Cochrane and clarify future cooperative relations with different entities within Cochrane.

In order to achieve this, two actions can be taken:

- Establish a closer relation to Cochrane Methodology Review Group (CMRG): drawing on the BMG member capacity, the BMG may be able to suggest prioritised research topics, recruit review authors and peer reviewers.
- Establish a closer relation to the editors of the Cochrane Handbook: clarifying the role of the BMG in the Cochrane Handbook.

Theme 2: Ensuring member involvement

The BMG currently has 231 active members registered in Archie, 863 followers on Twitter, and 195 persons, who are subscribed to the BMG list. BMG members possess many resources and skills within methodological research. To have this many members, followers, and BMG list subscribers is a great resource. Quite often, BMG members perform methodological research, which falls within the scope of the BMG.

In order to facilitate additional member activity, three actions can be taken:

- Establishing a 'repository' for methodological projects, giving the BMG members and other the possibility of flagging their methodological research projects.
- Establishing a 'finished research projects' tab on the website covering BMG relevant research projects of BMG convenors and members: a short abstract of aim, methods, and main findings. This will be included in the 'repository'.
- Provide a list of recent methodological publications (once every 6 months) based on a systematic search on PubMed, with possible highlighted publications.

Theme 3: Developing an internal BMG convenor framework

The daily work of the BMG is administered of the four co-convenors and the research coordinator. The tasks of the BMG are quite diverse and the intensity differs. In order to ensure that the workflow remains efficient, it is important that core tasks are continuously taken care of.

In order to achieve this, the following action can be taken:

- Re-defining the role of the convenors: assigning explicit responsibilities to each convenor. The responsibilities may be divided in many ways, and include a rotation principle. Important tasks are a) overall coordination (overall group coordination, including communication with Cochrane Handbook editors and CMRG and suggestion of strategy for ongoing core research projects relevant to BMG), b) coordination of drafts of editorials/commentaries (suggesting topics and be the main driver for drafting editorials or commentaries), c) home page and membership (monitoring and developing the BMG communication with members), and d) training and teaching (suggesting training material for the website and coordinating BMG related training events).

Theme 4: Ensuring an appropriate flow of relevant information

An appropriate flow of relevant information is an important tool to keep BMG members interested and engaged in the group. The BMG has a unique opportunity to reach many members and potential members

through the BMG list and the BMG Twitter account. A consistent flow of communication with a clear framework is likely to result in more active members and a higher degree of visibility.

The BMG website is a great tool for distributing information and an easy way to reach many members and potential members. An updated website containing clear and concise information is a key tool to keep visitors interested and to communicate with current and potential members.

Finally, the BMG could provide updates and discussions on bias related topics through editorials and commentaries. This would improve communication as it is an ideal forum for informing about new research and would ensure that the BMG remains visible and active.

In order to achieve this, five actions can be taken:

- Sending out biannual newsletters (summer and Christmas): a short update on what is going on within the BMG and updates on research projects. The newsletter will summarise and deepen tweets from Twitter and contain the list of recent methodological publications (see above).
- Using the BMG Twitter account more actively (tweeting twice every month): using the account to tweet about ongoing/finished research projects, changes to the website, and announcements.
- Redefining the BMG website:
 - Increased emphasis on research
 - Redefining 'training' to 1) online material (slides and presentations) and 2) ad hoc advice (through e-mail). Training events can be advertised for through the 'Our News' tab, the BMG list, and the BMG Twitter account.
- Updating the website annually: new searches for the literature list in order to update with new references and remove old references.
- Writing editorials/commentaries on bias relevant topics aimed at journals or the Cochrane Library. BMG members with an interest in a certain topic can be invited to participate.

Evaluating the strategy

The BMG strategy will be evaluated and adjusted continuously. A more formal evaluation will happen at a convenor meeting in the beginning of 2018.