



## The Campbell Collaboration: Helping To Understand “What Works”

*by Anthony Petrosino, David P. Farrington, and Lawrence W. Sherman*

### About the Authors

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Suppose you want to know whether boot camps reduce recidivism or whether early childhood prevention programs really help prevent future criminal behaviors. In the past, those interested in criminal justice interventions such as these had to collect countless studies from a variety of sources in order to answer these questions. Now there’s another option.

The Campbell Collaboration (C2) was launched in 2000 with the goal of offering systematic research reviews to researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.<sup>1</sup> C2, named in honor of the psychologist Donald T. Campbell, is an international organization centered on scholars who are

reviewing three areas of research: education, social welfare, and crime and justice.

The Campbell Crime and Justice Group (CCJG) has developed a computer-based library that will—in due course—contain more than 35 research reviews. These reviews are meant to help decisionmakers and others better understand the research conducted on these selected topics and help them make more informed decisions concerning the use of criminal justice interventions. (See “Research Reviews—What Are They?”)

### The Story Behind C2

The founders of C2 were not the first to develop an electronic library of systematic research reviews, but they were the first to adopt the idea for use in fields other than health and medicine.

The inspiration for C2 was the Cochrane Collaboration, formed in 1993. This group thought that new computer tools could be

## RESEARCH REVIEWS—WHAT ARE THEY?

Research reviews have been used in the criminology and criminal justice fields for decades, as decisionmakers asked researchers for help in making sense of large, fragmented, and sometimes conflicting knowledge bases. Research reviews take a broad look at multiple studies conducted in a given area, in an effort to identify “what works.”

Over the past 30 years, scholars have refined the methods of research reviews. These changes include an increase in the explicitness and detail that reviewers provide about their work, answering such questions as why certain studies were included, what search methods were used, how they were appraised, and what were the criteria for success of an intervention.<sup>1</sup>

1. See Petrosino, Anthony, Robert Boruch, Haluk Soydan, Lorna Duggan, and Julio Sanchez-Meca, “Meeting the Challenges of Evidence-Based Policy: The Campbell Collaboration,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2001); or Farrington, David, and Anthony Petrosino, “Systematic Reviews of Criminological Interventions: The Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group,” *International Annals of Criminology* 37(1/2) (2000).

used to improve the research review process in the health care arena. The result was an unparalleled electronic library of approximately 1,200 completed reviews.

Designed to prepare, maintain, and disseminate systematic reviews of research on the effects of health care interventions, the Cochrane Library is available on the World Wide Web or on CD-ROM.<sup>2</sup> The electronic nature of the Library allows the reviews to be maintained, updated, and disseminated more easily than in the more established print journals.

The success of the Cochrane Collaboration and its Library helped propel the popularity of evidence-based medicine and eventually led to discussions on how a similar infrastructure could be launched to facilitate evidence-based social policy. Professor Robert Boruch of the University of Pennsylvania and others discussed whether such an organization was necessary and sustainable, and meetings in England, Sweden, the United States, and elsewhere confirmed the international interest and eagerness of many to participate.<sup>3</sup>

It was from these discussions that C2 and CCJG were born.

## The CCJG

The CCJG coordinating group, which helps develop C2 guidelines, is responsible for choosing topics for the criminal justice systematic reviews, identifying individuals who could contribute to the projects, recognizing who would benefit from the work, offering advice to reviewers on how to proceed with the projects, and disseminating the information once the systematic reviews are complete.

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During its first 2 years, CCJG chose 25 topics for systematic reviews. The group has generally been proactive in selecting topics and in soliciting experienced reviewers who increase the visibility and credibility of the work. In 2002, CCJG began fielding unsolicited proposals.

Despite the rigorous and demanding nature of the assignment, the response from the academic community has been positive—all 38 titles in CCJG’s portfolio (see figure 1) have a lead author who has committed to heading the review team. Although a single person is invited to take the lead on the review, collaboration (including multidisciplinary and multinational authorship) is encouraged. Working as part of a team not only distributes the workload, it also provides partners who can help to ensure that review decisions are consistent throughout the project.

To date, the reviews have focused on policies, programs, and practices that reduce crime and delinquency. CCJG’s scope is broader, however, and plans are underway to initiate systematic reviews focusing on forensics, court and prison management, and police misconduct.

### The Steering Committee

A 17-member steering committee representing 13 nations guides the early development of CCJG and continues to set its agenda, identifying tasks that should be undertaken to advance the Group’s work and acting as the ultimate editorial board for CCJG products. International representation is considered important not only for identifying potential collaborators and evaluation studies from nations outside of the United States (particularly studies written in languages other than English), but also for identifying potential dissemination outlets for Campbell reviews. Many steering committee members have strong connections to the policy and practice community, allowing them to understand the needs of the field and pinpoint what questions are the hot topics of the time.

The Jerry Lee Center of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania serves as the institutional base for CCJG.

### The CCJG Database

C2–RIPE, the Campbell Collaboration Reviews of Interventions and Policy

**Figure 1: CCJG Portfolio of Review Titles**

Boot Camps	Interventions for the Forensic Mental Health Population	Prison-Based Drug Treatment
Child Skills Training	Interventions for Serious, Persistent Juvenile Offenders	Problem-Oriented Policing
Closed-Circuit Television	Juvenile Aftercare Programs	Programs to Prevent Repeat Victimization
Cognitive-Behavioral Programs	Juvenile Curfews	Programs for Victims of Nonfamilial Violence
Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration (Adults)	Length of Prison Sentence	Restorative Justice Programs
Community-Based Programs for Juveniles	Mentoring Programs	Scared Straight and Other Juvenile Awareness Programs
Corporate Crime Deterrence Strategies	Neighborhood Watch	Screening Instruments for Risk of Suicide of Youths During Juvenile Lockup
Cost-Benefits of Sentencing	Nonpharmacological Treatment for Personality Disorders	Screening Instruments for Risk of Violence in the Forensic Mental Health Population
Drug Courts	Offender Reentry to Work Programs	Sex Offender Treatment
Early Childhood Prevention	Outpatient Treatment for Drug-Involved Offenders	Situational Factors for Preventing Institutional Violence
Electronic Monitoring	Police Strategies to Reduce Illegal Gun Carrying	Street Lighting
Faith-Based Programs	Prevention of Crime Aboard/Against Commercial Aircraft	
Family-Based Programs		
Hotspots Policing		
Interventions for Domestic Violence		

Evaluations, was designed to become a central archive and resource for all the C2 systematic reviews, with the hope that ultimately it will be viewed as an important resource for criminal justice policymakers, practitioners, researchers, journalists, and the general public.

Because the archive will only be available electronically, C2-RIPE can be updated easily and disseminated more quickly than print journals or reports. C2-RIPE is a “living” or perpetual database, because reviewers are required to substantively update their work within 24 months. The updating process allows the reviewers to incorporate any relevant studies reported since the last publication of the review, employ different analyses to respond to criticisms, and take into account any new methodological developments that the steering committee agrees are necessary. This is important, given the provisional and dynamic nature of evidence, and it also will dissuade the usual “one-off” nature of many reviews, which are not updated when funding or interest wanes.

## Funding

CCJG has aggressively sought external funding. Four organizations now support the work of the Group: NIJ, the Canadian Department of Justice, the UK Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, and the Smith-Richardson Foundation. Contacts with other funding agencies have been promising, and the Australian Institute of Criminology generously hosts and updates the CCJG Web site.

## Goals

The goal of the Campbell Collaboration and C2-RIPE is to become an important resource for evidence-based policy by providing an accessible archive containing hundreds—if not thousands—of high-quality reviews. But C2 does not wish to oversell the role of evidence in policy decisions. Because good evidence cannot always resolve the political and administrative dilemmas faced by many decisionmakers, Campbell reviews will inform decisionmakers by explicitly revealing what is known and not known based on the scientific evidence.

## Acknowledgment

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Criminologists have often considered criminology a noble profession because it aims to reduce the misery stemming from crime and injustice. To the extent that the Campbell Collaboration can fulfill Don Campbell’s vision of helping people to make well-informed decisions, it will help criminologists stay true to criminology’s noble intent.

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## For More Information

- For more information about CCJG and its projects, visit its Web site at <http://www.aic.gov.au/campbellcj>.
- Contact Anthony Petrosino, Coordinator, 54 Middlesex Turnpike, Building B, Bedford, MA 01730, 781-276-4670, [anthony\\_petrosino@harvard.edu](mailto:anthony_petrosino@harvard.edu).

## Notes

1. More information about the Campbell Collaboration can be found in Petrosino, Anthony, Robert Boruch, Haluk Soydan, Lorna Duggan, and Julio Sanchez-Meca, “Meeting the Challenges of Evidence-Based Policy: The Campbell Collaboration,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2001); or at its Web site, <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org>.
2. Visit the Cochrane Library at <http://www.cochrane.org> for more information.
3. For example, see Davies, Philip, Anthony Petrosino, and Iain Chalmers, eds., *Proceedings of the International Meeting on Systematic Reviews of the Effects of Social and Educational Interventions, July 15–16*, London: School of Public Policy, University College–London, 1999.