

Guidelines for preparing a practice survey

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) knowledge reviews will usually include both a research review and a practice survey. This paper sets out guidelines for reviewers undertaking a practice survey for SCIE. The guidelines should act as a framework for considering current practice. While they establish certain minimum requirements, they do not attempt to dictate precise methodology or other review conduct. They will also need to be adapted to the precise circumstances of the commission, including the time and other resources available. Decisions about adapting the criteria will be made between reviewers and SCIE.

Accordingly, the guidelines require that reviewers negotiate with SCIE a methodological plan (or protocol) before work starts, and that the plan must take account of the issues addressed in these guidelines.

The focus of practice surveys

Practice surveys find, describe and consider examples of current practice. You should write a short and clear statement about the question or issue the survey is about. This statement will act as the benchmark for deciding how to construct criteria for including and excluding material from the review.

Depending on the requirements of the particular commission, the survey will indicate:

- current professional consensus
- custom and practice
- emerging new practice
- the knowledge base or other rationale for professional activity, whether implicit or explicit
- gaps in available information about current practice, and
- gaps in the knowledge base for practice.

Stakeholder involvement

SCIE is committed to stakeholder involvement. Reviewers should consider how stakeholders, particularly those using the specific service which is the subject of the commission, can be involved in this activity, for example, in setting the terms of the review and evaluating the evidence.

Sources of material

The survey should consider the appropriate range of sources available and give reasons for the sources identified and chosen. Sources to consider include:

- the System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe
- CareData
- published accounts of practice, including user and carer accounts
- unpublished accounts of practice including inspection and regulation documents
- awards materials, for example, TOPSS accolades and IDeA awards.

Search methods

The survey should demonstrate how sources have been searched and give reasons for the method(s) used. Methods to consider include:

- open and focused interviews
- web searches
- focus groups
- literature searches.

Inclusion criteria

Because there is no consensus about an explicit definition of good practice, the survey should clearly set out the criteria on which it includes its practice examples. It should distinguish between self-reporting and the survey's explicit criteria for good practice.

Significant characteristics are likely to include:

- an evaluation of practice
- an account of user participation
- acceptability to service users and their supporters and carers. This is less easy to demonstrate for involuntarily received services, where 'explicable' may be a more appropriate characteristic to look for
- feasibility in everyday practice
- sustainability in everyday practice.

A useful question to ask yourself may be 'What is effective for whom, in what circumstances and against what standard?'

Reporting results

Authors should bear in mind that there are two purposes to the practice survey:

- it allows external scrutiny of the relationship between the search/inclusion criteria and the survey findings
- it also allows the SCIE final product to offer current information about practice to the social care field.

For these reasons:

- the survey should use a format for recording information about the material included in the review and describe methods, and
- practice examples should be supported by contact details and permission for these to be included in SCIE's final product.