**Policy document on GRADE publications and decision rules: procedures for internal management**

This document pertains to any official GRADE documents (published in a peer reviewed journal or published online). It is approved by the GGG. It will be periodically reviewed by the GGG and updated as necessary.

**Document history**

- Elie drafted initial version 062016
- GGG approved it 03022017
- modified 12072017 by Reem
- modified 05092017 by Reem
- Discussed on G3 call 07092017, edited by Holger and Elie
- modified 12092017 by Reem
- discussed and approved at GGG 28092017

**Types of GRADE publications:**

- GRADE guidance papers provide specific guidance on how to make judgments in line with the GRADE methodology. GRADE guidance papers will typically include examples from the literature (published or unpublished) to explain how to apply the guidance. All GRADE guidance papers should include text explicitly stating that they are GRADE guidance in the title, abstract and in the body of the paper.

- GRADE conceptual papers discuss concepts that may not have been piloted on examples and that may not necessarily result in GRADE guidance. All GRADE conceptual papers

should include text explicitly stating that they are not GRADE guidance in the title, abstract and in the body of the paper. It should also explain why the paper is a conceptual paper and not a GRADE guidance paper, and, when possible, to describe if it is in the process to be developed as GRADE guidance.

**Publications**

1. Any publication by any of the project groups should follow the GRADE publication policies as detailed below.

2. The project group lead or a designee circulates the article to all project group members for review and feedback.

3. After incorporating feedback from the project group, the project group lead or a designee circulates the article to the GRADE Working Group (GWG) members for review and feedback at least one week before the GWG meeting (see details under 'Process for a decision to adopt a document as official GRADE guidance'). Members of the GWG will have the chance to provide feedback up to two weeks after the GWG meeting (refer to point 5).

4. Each paper should be presented and discussed at one GWG meeting, at the least. If there is a major methodological change or concern expressed, the issue needs to be discussed at a second GRADE meeting before final approval by GGG. If no major change

or concern expressed at the first meeting, then there is no need to discuss at a second GWG meeting.

5. The paper is sent to the GWG members who will be asked to contact the authors within two weeks if they have major concerns.

6. If there are major changes to the paper based on the feedback, then it should be sent back to the project group members for review.

7. Then the liaison person sends the paper to GGG for final approval (yes, no) for publication as official GRADE guidance or conceptual paper; this is supposed to be a final quick look to ensure no major GRADE principle is violated. Members of the GGG are expected to respond within a week, or two weeks upon special request, otherwise it will be assumed that they approve the paper.

8. If any member in GGG does not approve a paper, she/he should explicitly explain the reasons for not accepting it as a GRADE paper and which GRADE principles have been violated.

9. When GGG has approved the paper, it becomes a GRADE paper.

10. After approval by the GGG and publication, the project group lead or a designee shares the published version of the articles with the GWG for information and education.

11. Authorship policy will follow the model of previous GRADE publications: any substantial contribution should be acknowledged with authorship.

12. Articles not approved by the GWG or GGG would not be published as official GRADE articles, but can be published separately.

**GRADE** Guidance Group

**Decision options during the GWG meeting**

The decision options have to:

- Be as explicitly described as possible

- Be mutually exclusive

- Be worded neutrally

- Include abstain option

For example, the options for a decision on whether to approve a document as official GRADE

guidance would typically be: yes, no, abstain

**Process for a decision to adopt a document as official GRADE guidance or conceptual GRADE paper**

- Any GRADE guidance or conceptual paper should be developed through a project group

- The document is circulated to the GWG at least one week ahead of the meeting

- The GGG reviews and approves the decision options ahead of the GWG meeting

- The options are presented at the beginning of the relevant presentation

- A "neutral person" assigned by the GGG will chair the session and moderate discussion.

- At the end of the presentation and discussion, a "neutral person" assigned by the GGG reads the question, states the options in a neutral way, and asks for a vote

- The "neutral person" needs to meet the following criteria:

  o Is a member of the GRADE Guidance Group (GGG), with priority to one of the two co-chairs

**GRADE** Guidance Group

- o  Is not involved in the proposed guidance

- o  Otherwise, does not feel conflicted and would not be perceived as conflicted (whenever possible)

- An anonymous vote is carried out using an online voting tool (or by paper based ballot when online voting is not logistically possible). Members who attend in person or remotely (e.g. using skype) can participate in the vote

**Process for a decision on an issue that arises during a GWG meeting**

- The two co-chairs agree on whether the issue should go for a vote or not

- The two co-chairs draft the decision options with feedback from members of the GGG and if needed from members of the GWG

- The two co-chairs assign a "neutral person" to read the question, state the options in a neutral way, and ask for a vote

- An anonymous vote is carried out using an online voting tool (or by paper based ballot when online voting is not logistically possible). Members who attend in person or remotely (e.g. using skype) can participate in the vote

**Rules for the final decision**

- A majority of 80% of all those who participate in the vote (i.e., excluding abstentions from the denominator) picking the same option is required for making a final decision

- The specific question, specific options, and vote results are documented in the minutes

- It is the responsibility of the group who brought the document forward for voting to identify and note during the discussion any concerns expressed by members of the GWG

- If the vote is not in favor of adopting a document as GRADE guidance or a GRADE conceptual paper, the group who brought it forward will let the GGG co-chairs know whether there is a plan to bring back a modified version of the document for re-voting at a following GWG meeting

- The group submits to the GGG co-chairs the revised document along with a cover letter explaining how concerns expressed by members of the GWG were addressed; this has to occur at least one weeks ahead of the next GWG meeting

- The revised version would then go again through the above described process

**Discussion and voting**

- The GGG liaison for the project groups should take responsibility for ensuring the groups know about the approval process as GRADE guidance

- A topic can be discussed as many times as needed during GWG meeting (for both types of papers)

- Named authors are allowed to participate in the voting

- GRADE guidance and conceptual papers can be voted on up to 3 times during GWG meetings. The GGG will decide if a specific paper can exceed that limit.

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- If a paper is rejected, after voting, additional (anonymous) feedback, including through

  email, about reasons for rejection or concerns may be requested from members of the

  GRADE working group if authors desire this feedback