



# Lifting the Cloud

Micro-session on grey literature

# Today we will

Review what grey literature is, where to find it, and how to scope a search for larger projects

## **COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

1. WHAT IS GREY LITERATURE?
2. WHAT KIND OF GREY LITERATURE DOES THE LIBRARY LOOK FOR?
3. HOW IS GREY LITERATURE SEARCHED?
4. CAN GREY LITERATURE BE SEARCHED COMPREHENSIVELY?



# Agenda

1. DEFINE
2. TYPES
3. SEARCH
4. KEEPING TRACK
5. APPRAISAL
6. COPYRIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

# 1. DEFINE

What is considered grey literature? The term 'grey literature' was first coined in the 1970s but has had many names over the past fifty years, including 'fuzzy literature', 'fleeting literature' and 'invisible literature'.



# Grey Literature Defined

“Grey literature stands for manifold document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats that are protected by intellectual property rights, of sufficient quality to be collected and preserved by library holdings or institutional repositories, but not controlled by commercial publishers i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.”

Schnopfel J. Towards a Prague definition of grey literature. Presented at: Twelfth International Conference on Grey Literature: Transparency in Grey Literature. Grey Tech Approaches to High Tech Issues. Prague, 6-7 Dec 2010, Czech Republic. pp.11-26. Available from: [http://archivesic.ccsd.cnrs.fr/sic\\_00581570/document](http://archivesic.ccsd.cnrs.fr/sic_00581570/document)



## .... In Plain Language

Anything that's not a book or journal article is most likely grey literature

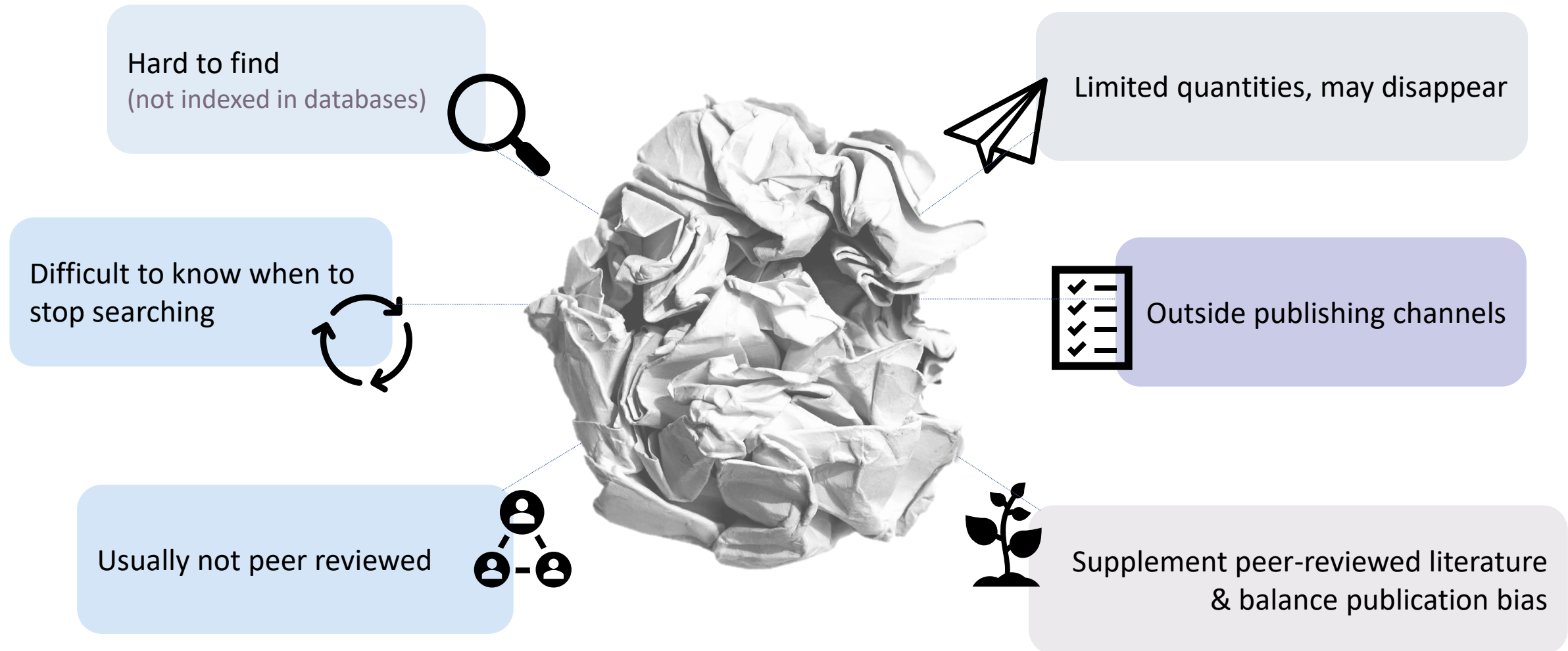
## 2. TYPES



# Grey Literature can be...

- ✓ Website Content
- ✓ Dissertations / Theses
- ✓ Statistical Reports
- ✓ Conference Proceedings
- ✓ Technical Reports
- ✓ Government Publications
- ✓ Green / White Papers
- ✓ Institutional Reports
- ✓ Streamed Video
- ✓ Blog Posts
- ✓ Podcasts
- ✓ Social Media Posts
- ✓ Satellite Data
- ✓ Newsletters

# Characteristics of Grey Literature



# Why is Grey Literature Important in Public Health?

- Numerous, diverse partners & stakeholders outside academia
- Journal article conventions may not be a good fit for in-depth reports
- Importance of best practices & public health guidelines
- Fewer researchers in academia specialize in public health
- Reliance on non-health data sources
- Leadership role of agencies, government: open publishing
- Front-line practitioners tend to publish via grey literature

# 3. SEARCH

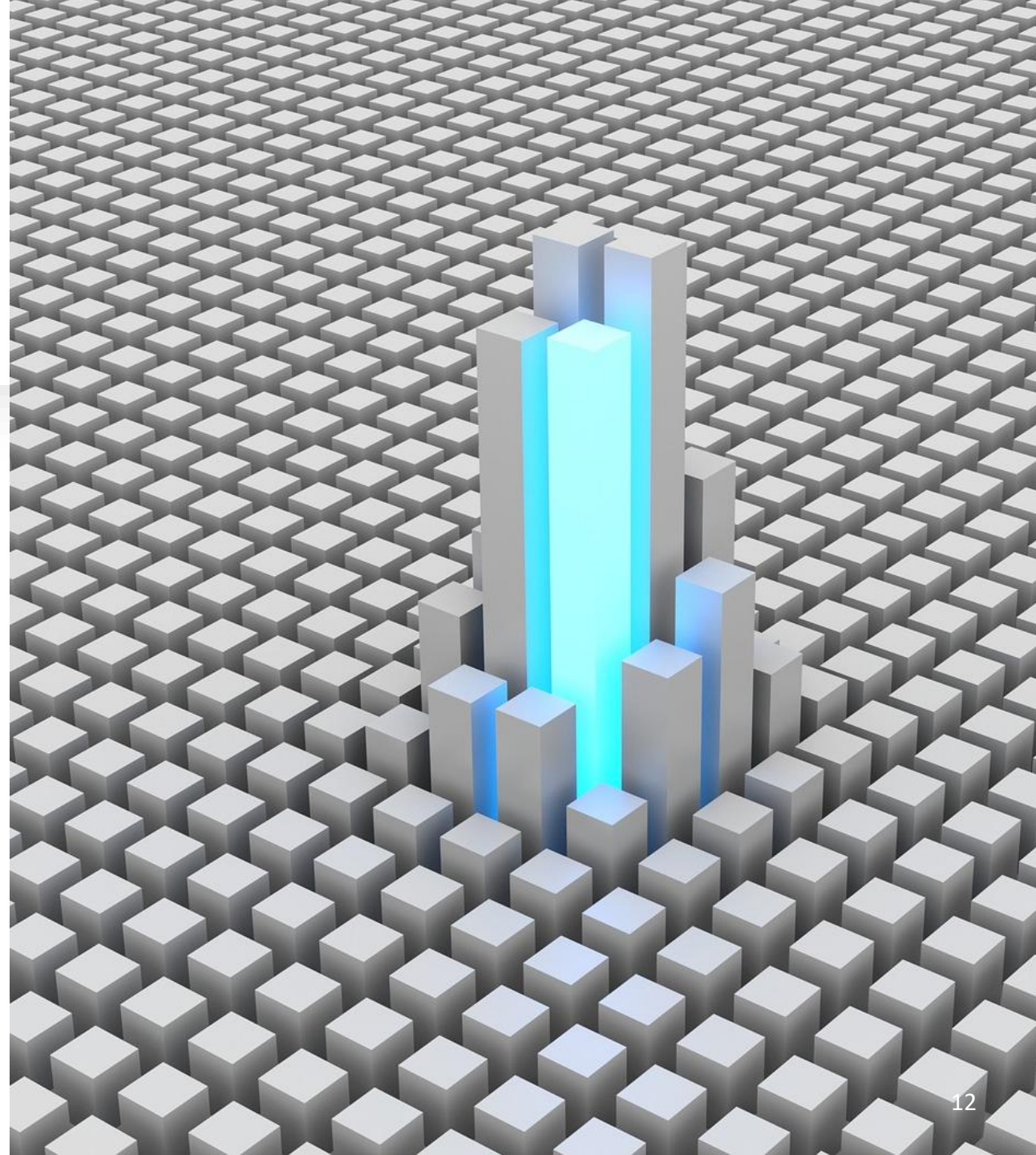
What common or typical source types for grey literature might you find useful in your day-to-day practice?



# Places to Locate Grey Literature

- I. Experts in the Field
- II. Targeted Websites
- III. Repositories
- IV. Search Engines

*Note: This is not an exhaustive list, there are many additional places and methods of locating grey literature we won't be exploring today*





# I. Experts in the Field

- Have in-depth knowledge of subject matter
- May be aware of internal resources or in-progress research by colleagues
- Are up-to-date on new research that is being conducted in their field
- May create opportunities to collaborate & share work to maximize efficiency



# Experts in the Field

- Connect with Public Health Colleagues:
- [SLSP – Shared Library Services Partnership](#)
- [OPHEN – Ontario Public Health Evaluators Network](#)
- [APHEO – Association of Public Health Epidemiologists of Ontario](#)
- Consider other listservs you may have access to

## II. Targeted Websites

Organizations that produce primary research or synthesized findings which is only available on their website



- |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CAN  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Institut national de santé publique du Québec</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Canadian Institute for Health Information</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Public Health Agency of Canada</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Public Health Ontario</a></li></ul> |
| INTL | <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">NICE Public Health Guidance</a></li><li>• <a href="#">EU Center for Disease Prevention and Control</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Public Health England</a></li><li>• <a href="#">World Health Organization</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</a></li></ul>          |

# Search a Targeted Website

## 1. Go beyond the Search Bar

- Does the website have: a Publication Listing? Topic Drop Down Menu?
- How has the organization already organized their content for you?

## 2. Is there an Advanced Search option or Search Tips?

- Can you search an Exact Phrase *“built environment”*?
- Use Truncation (*e.g., build\* = builds, building, builders, etc.*)?
- Is Boolean automatic? (*AND / OR*)
- No search tips? Try variations of a word and see if you bring back more, less, or the same number of results in the search bar

## 3. When using a search bar, start by searching 1 concept

- Add more concepts as needed
- Try searching a website using Google. Enter `[site:website.ca]` followed by a space and the words or phrases you want to find within the website.  
Example: `site:bccdc.ca ticks`

# III. Repositories

- A repository is a collection of resources from multiple sources that stores and maintains their collection in an organized way
- Repositories may include grey literature *and* published literature, such as TRIP Database and ODPRN



## CAN

- [ODPRN](#)
- [Canada Commons](#)
- [Canada Theses Portal](#)

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## INTL

- [TRIP Database](#)
- [NACCHO Model Practice Database](#)
- [DISASTERlit](#)
- [Campbell Collaboration](#)

## IV. Search Engines

Search engines index a percentage of what is available online.

Academic research papers, white papers and professional blogs may be missed by search engines if they are held within a database, behind a paywall, or part of an intranet.



# Search Engines: Advantages

Ideal for quick searches

Ideal for scoping questions

Diverse

Mega hits

Easy access to non-text sources  
(i.e., videos, diagrams, etc.)



# Search Engines: Drawbacks

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- Personalized searching
- Echo Chamber Effect
- Proprietary ranking algorithm
- Searches for unknown synonyms and related terms
- Limits the number of search terms you can use
- Impossible to remove duplicate results
- Often cannot search within online databases (“invisible web”) or deep web
- Searches lack standardization and reproducibility



# Overcoming Search Engine Limitations

- Overwhelmed by search results?  
Try reviewing only first 50  
*(relevancy drops dramatically after this point)*
- Test synonyms by searching a single word and looking at bolded words in the results list
- Change your search settings (*search customization, personal ad settings*)
- Use [Advanced Search](#) options to increase number of terms and control over search



# Search Engine - Advanced

- Use Advanced Search to:
  - Search for exact phrases using quotation marks
  - Limit by region or filetype:pdf
  - Restrict by date range
  - Restrict by site:gc.ca
  - Choose where keywords appear on the webpage
- Ensure your Boolean terms are capitalized – AND or OR
- Clear your search history; delete cookies
- Try additional search engines and compare results

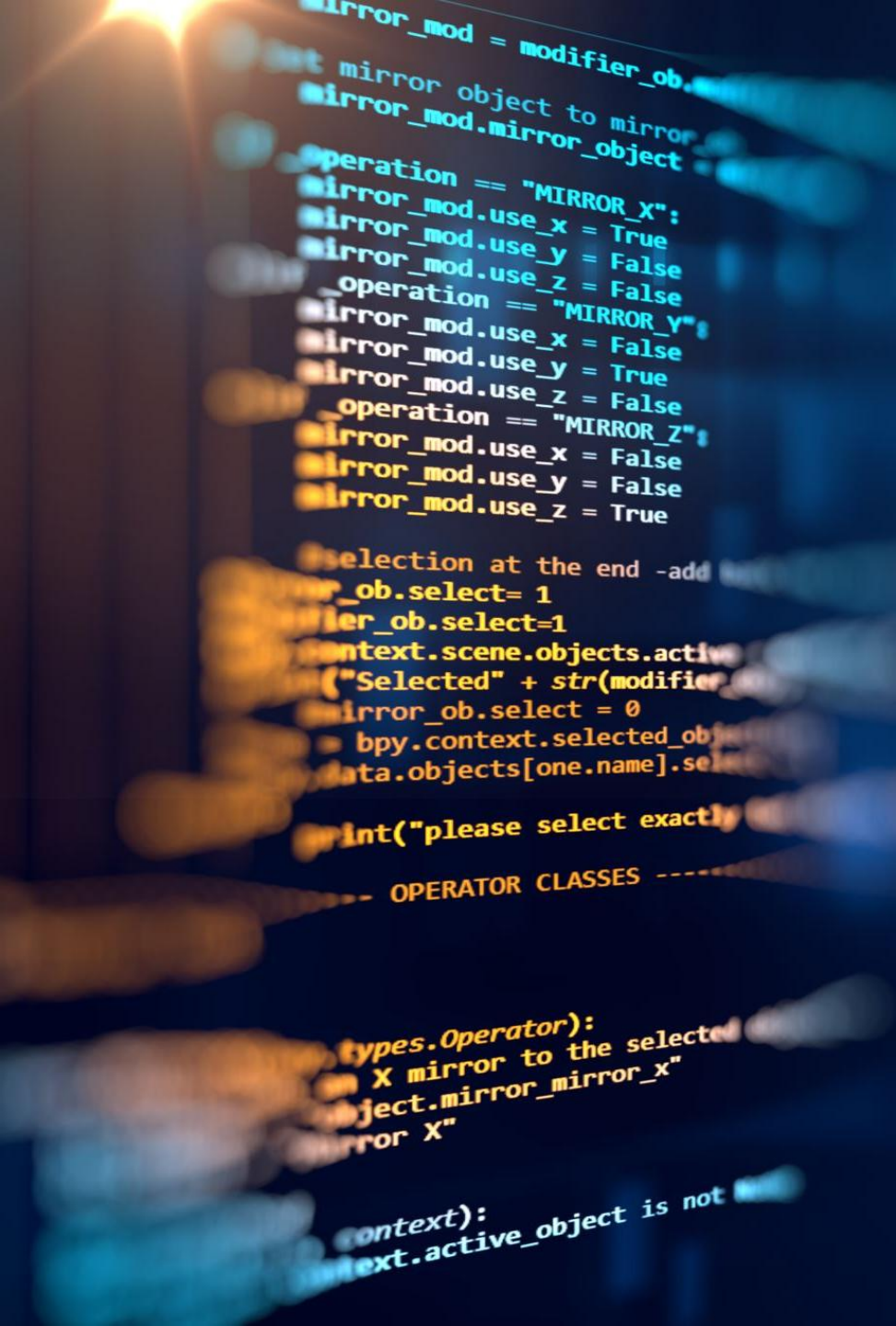




# Beyond Google, Bing, & Yahoo...

Try a new search engine to see if you retrieve different results:

- META-SEARCHES: [Dogpile](#)
- PRIVACY: [Qwant](#), [StartPage](#), [Duck Duck Go](#)
- DEEP WEB: [MedNar](#)
- CONSCIOUS: [Ecosia](#), [GiveWater](#)
- FILTER: [Million Short](#)



# Custom Search Engines

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- Retrieve results from specified websites
- Good for targeted searches – promotes efficiency
- Created by OPHLA for Health Units:

[Search Ontario Public Health Unit Websites](#)

[Search Canadian Health Agency Websites](#)

[Search US State Government Websites](#)

[Search Select International Public Health Websites](#)

## 4. KEEPING TRACK

For larger projects where you are required to report your methodology (showing how you've found and selected the research in your report or publication), tracking all searches of websites, directories, search engines where you've looked can be difficult

# Tracking a Grey Literature Scan

Tracking a quick scan of grey literature may include the type of grey literature searched, the source it was retrieved from, search terms, filters and/or text words applied, number of results retrieved, and number of items selected for review

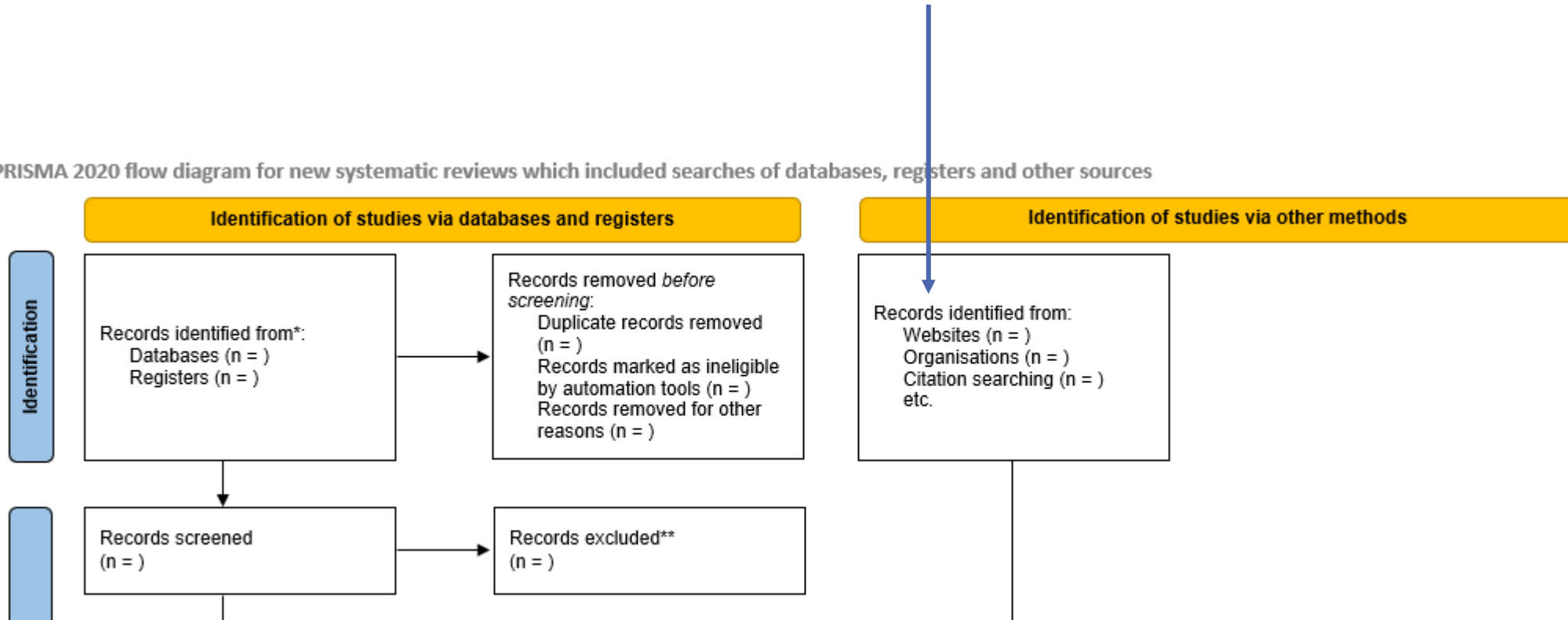
## Tracking Example:

| Type                        | Source                             | Search Query                          | Results Screened | Results Selected  |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Repositories /<br>Databases | TRIPP<br>Canada Commons<br>medRxiv | Subjects +<br>Filters +<br>Text Words | 85               | 12 resources      |
| Targeted Websites           | [List of 24 websites]              | Topic + Text Words                    | 24 websites      | 14 resources      |
| <b>Total</b>                |                                    |                                       |                  | <b>29 Results</b> |

# Tracking a Grey Literature Search

For larger reports and publications, results are recorded in a PRISMA diagram under 'Identification of Records via other methods' and 'Records identified from'.

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

# How do you send Grey Literature results?

- Microsoft Office Word
- Microsoft Office Excel
- .RIS file (*upload into Reference Management Software*)



# 5. APPRAISE



# Critical Appraisal

Things to consider when evaluating website content:

- Date of publication? (*currency is important*)
- URL validity
- Web Design
- Contact Information
- Authorship



# Critical Appraisal

- Is the agency well-known?
- What are the biases?
- If you are unsure, consult colleagues or experts

# Key Questions:

1. Who is the author, are they who they claim to be? (legitimacy)
2. How current is the information?
3. Is the information based on research/data/analysis or is it opinion piece?
4. Does the author/host have an agenda? (bias)
5. Is the information shared for commercial purposes?
6. Can you verify some cited sources, facts? (methodological quality)
7. Does the hosting site have a sponsor?
8. Does this information add anything new?
9. Is the evidence clear and relevant?
10. Tools: [AACODS](#) | [Public Health Ontario Guide to Appraising Grey Literature](#)

# Additional Tools

1. [Evaluating Information Sources](#) (McMaster University Library)
2. [Evaluating Primary Source Web Sites](#) (RUSA History Section, American Library Association)
3. [Evaluating Resource Quality - Web Resources](#) (Christopher Center Library, Valparaiso University)
4. [Evaluating Resources](#) (Berkeley Library, University of California)
5. [Evaluating Sources](#) (Duke University Libraries)
6. [Evaluating Web Pages](#) (Wolfgram Memorial Library, Widener University)
7. [Evaluating info from the web](#) (Colorado State University Libraries)



# 6. COPYRIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

All documents, posts, and images on the internet (unless otherwise specified) are copyright protected.



# Copyright & Grey Literature

- All internet content (even free content) is copyrighted
  - Infringement of copyright poses legal risks even when using grey literature sources
- Copyright applies regardless of the use of the © symbol
- Avoid copyright infringement by:
  - Attributing references and quotations
  - Instead of copying/embedding content, link to the original source
  - Checking for copyright or permissions statements
  - Determining if your proposed use infringes copyright
  - Obtaining written permission from the rightsholder for your intended use
- Ask the library – we are here to help

# Review: Steps of Grey Literature Searching

- Step 1 —→ **Identify your sources in advance**  
Make a list of key knowledge-producing organizations (core and topical), grey literature repositories, conferences, etc. you are going to search
- Step 2 —→ **Consult colleagues, experts to prioritize sources**  
Social media can be a good source for this type of expertise
- Step 3 —→ **Set clear parameters to avoid information overload**  
Specify the # of pages of web search results you will review; Set limits: date, jurisdiction, language, etc.
- Step 4 —→ **Do a targeted search of websites (key organizations, conferences, repositories, etc.)**  
Track your search and results
- Step 5 —→ **Do a general web search to capture other sources**  
Use search engines to explore additional relevant resources
- Step 6 —→ **Scan references lists of all relevant items you find**

# Staying Up-To-Date

- Social Media Channels
- Sign up for Newsletters, Blogs or Podcast alerts
- Set up automated/synthesized alerts
- Ask your librarian





# Additional Resources

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1. [SLSP Find Grey Literature](#)
2. [Grey matters: a practical tool for searching health-related grey literature](#) / CADTH
3. Book: [Searching the grey literature](#) / Sarah Bonato
4. McArthur A. [How to find and use grey literature for scoping reviews](#) / Public Health Ontario 2016
5. Library – we are here to help and happy to conduct grey literature searches on your behalf



Thank you!

For more information, please [Contact Us](#)