Proposals from authors to conduct new or updated Cochrane Reviews: process and guidance

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Process for handling review proposals

1. Proposal submission
   Authors submit a proposal to conduct a new Cochrane Review, or to update a published Cochrane Review, to the central Editorial Manager site.

2. Evidence surveillance
   - Proposal for a new Cochrane Review: the Evidence Pipeline team screen the PICO of the proposed review to help in identifying overlap with existing Cochrane Reviews and gaps in the evidence (see 'Guidance' item 2, below).
   - Proposal to update a Cochrane Review: the Evidence Pipeline team run a quick search in CENTRAL to identify new studies potentially eligible for inclusion.

3. Discussion and assessment
   The Proposal Manager initiates a ‘Discussion’ on the central Editorial Manager site, inviting topic experts to assess the proposal.
   - Topic experts nominated by a Cochrane group can be involved in discussions. To nominate additional participants in proposal discussions, please email support@cochrane.org with the person’s details (name, email address, affiliated Cochrane group). If relevant, please specify whether the person will assess proposals covering specific topics only, and provide keywords for the topics they will consider.

4. Decision to accept or reject
   Participants in the discussion will make a decision to accept or reject the proposal.
   - An accept decision means that the authors will be invited to submit a draft protocol or review update to Cochrane Central Editorial Service.
   - The acceptance of a proposal is not a guarantee of publication.
   - Please note that authors should not be requested to revise their proposal. If it is not possible to evaluate the proposal based on the information provided, discussion participants should recommend a reject decision. They may also provide brief feedback for the authors if preferred.
5. Indicate support for authors

After reaching a decision to accept, the topic experts can indicate their ability to provide support to the authors during the protocol or review development process.

6. Flag high-profile reviews

Topic experts are also asked to flag whether the proposed article could be a high-profile or controversial review. In these cases, the Proposal Manager will contact the Cochrane Review Development team and the Communications team about potential support for the authors.

Guidance for topic experts assessing proposals

Within Editorial Manager, topic experts are asked to consider the following questions when assessing proposals toward a decision to accept or reject:

Proposal for a new Cochrane Review

1. Does the proposed review cover an important question, suitable for a Cochrane Review?

Topic experts may determine that a proposal is not of importance to the Cochrane Library’s audiences, or that the question does not lend itself to being answered by a systematic review. In these cases, the proposal should be rejected.

2. Is the proposed review free from overlap with other Cochrane Reviews or protocols? If not, is overlap with an existing review justified?

Would the proposed review add to the evidence base in this topic area?

The results of the Evidence Pipeline team PICO screening will be available within Editorial Manager to help topic experts evaluate whether gaps in the evidence exist that are sufficient enough to justify overlap with existing Cochrane Library content.

If the proposal overlaps with existing content, and a new review in the same topic area is not justified, the proposal should be rejected.

3. Would you recommend that the authors be invited to submit a draft protocol?

If the proposal covers an important question, or the importance of the question is not yet fully clear, the proposal should be taken forward and the authors invited to submit a draft protocol. Using a completed protocol to assess the question’s importance allows authors to access Cochrane tools (including RevMan) and Cochrane resources.

If on submission and full assessment of the protocol, editors deem the topic is of insufficient importance for a Cochrane Review, the methods are not appropriate for the question, or the protocol is otherwise of low quality, the protocol will be rejected.

Proposal to update a Cochrane Review

These questions are based on the Decision framework to assess systematic reviews for updating cited in the Cochrane Handbook.

1. Does the proposed review update still address a current, important question?

Topic experts may determine that an updated review would not be of importance to the Cochrane Library’s audiences at this time.

2. Is the published review up to date? Are there new studies, relevant methods or information available that would change findings?

The results of the Evidence Pipeline team’s CENTRAL search for new studies potentially eligible for inclusion will be available within Editorial Manager.

3. Would you recommend that we invite the authors to submit a draft update to Cochrane Central Editorial Service?

If this a new author team, the Proposal Manager will invite a draft protocol. New authors are also asked to seek agreement from authors of the latest published version, to take over the topic. This correspondence is available on the submission File Inventory. There is no guarantee of acceptance for publication at this stage.

Following a decision to accept, topic experts are also asked to consider the following opportunities for support to the authors:

4. If you are affiliated with a Cochrane group, will your group be able to provide support to the authors in developing their protocol and/or review?

If you are able to provide author support, you will be copied into the acceptance email to authors, as well as the email to authors inviting a draft protocol or review update. This will enable authors to contact you directly if they wish to seek support.
Indicating your ability to provide author support also means that the new protocol or review update will be listed in your group’s section in Archie.

5. Is this a high-profile review?

- Upon publication, could the review elicit substantial public attention and interest, either positive or negative?
- Has the review been funded or commissioned?

Author teams of high-profile reviews may qualify for centralized support during the development of the protocol and review: for example, assistance in writing or running searches, assessment of analysis and GRADE ratings prior to write-up, dedicated author support with author queries before submission.

In addition, the Cochrane Communications team will be alerted to the initiation of a review marked as 'high-profile', to help to the team plan for dissemination activities. Authors of controversial reviews may also be offered support in handling engagement on their review.

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**Actions for Proposal Managers following accept and reject decisions**

**Accept - Cochrane group can offer author support during protocol or review development**

- Mark the proposal as accepted in Editorial Manager,
  - Proposal for a new Cochrane Review: ensure the new protocol is created in RevMan and listed in the relevant Cochrane group’s section in Archie.
  - Proposal to update a Cochrane Review: adjust the author byline on the previous published version and move to authoring phase within the relevant Cochrane group’s section in Archie.
- Copy the Cochrane group in to the acceptance email to authors.
- Invite the authors to submit the draft protocol or review update to Cochrane Central Editorial Service.
  - Copy the Cochrane group in to the invitation email to authors, so that groups are aware of the information and guidance provided at this stage.

**Accept - authors will work independently**

- Mark the proposal as accepted in Editorial Manager,
  - Proposal for a new Cochrane Review: ensure the new protocol is created in RevMan and listed in the Central Editorial Service section in Archie.
  - Proposal to update a Cochrane Review: adjust the author byline on the previous published version and move to authoring phase within the Central Editorial Service section in Archie.
- Invite the authors to submit the draft protocol or review update to Cochrane Central Editorial Service.

**Reject**

- Notify authors of the reject decision and share any relevant feedback from topic editors.

**High-profile reviews**

- Notify the Review Development team and the Cochrane Communications team, to initiate support for the author team during development and to plan for potential dissemination activities.