COVID-related reviews: FAQs for CRGs

**Q What is the purpose of the Question Bank?**

The Question Bank has two objectives, namely:

- to list reviews that are underway in Cochrane and those we are aware of in other organisations to direct decision-makers to the best available evidence, and
- to reduce duplication of effort within Cochrane and, as much as possible, with other organisations, by showing where work is underway and which questions are not yet being addressed.

The Question Bank is still being developed, and is updated regularly.

**Q Why are COVID-related reviews being co-ordinated centrally and not through CRGs?**

In the early stages of the pandemic, it became clear that CRGs, Methods Groups, Geographic Centres and Fields were receiving a range of requests from commissioners and other organizations to undertake reviews as rapidly as possible. While some questions fell naturally into a CRG scope, many did not, and the central team saw the need to act quickly to collect information about the work that was underway to avoid duplication of effort, and to initiate reviews identified as particularly important for decision-making.

**Q How often is the Question Bank updated?**

The website is updated daily to reflect changes in status (e.g. from ‘in development’ to ‘published’), and to reflect how questions are refined during the prioritisation process. The process to identify research questions was open, and reflects the varied perspectives of the people who provided them, and the settings in which they work. However, as we become more targeted in our approach, we will remove some questions from the list during the prioritisation process, for example, if they are deemed to be unsuitable for development as rapid reviews, or if there is too much overlap with existing questions. Questions may also be combined or reworded after prioritisation and consultation with experts.

**Q Are all questions on the bank being registered and pursued by Cochrane?**

Submitting a question to the Question Bank does not act as a title registration. The Question Bank holds questions that we know are in development – or have been published – either within Cochrane or with other organisations, as well as questions that have been submitted by a range of stakeholders. Those that have not been addressed may not be suitable for development as standard or rapid reviews within Cochrane; these enter the prioritisation process which identifies whether they are important questions, and whether they should be refined and addressed within Cochrane.

If a question has not been identified as a priority, but the central team has received an expression of interest from a team, a joint decision will be made about whether the title should be pursued. This will be based on the importance of the question, author expertise, and editorial capacity. When a protocol or review is submitted, the CRG and central team retain the right to reject it, or request revisions.

**Q What is the process when a review that falls under a CRG’s scope is identified as a priority?**

When a review that falls under a specific CRG’s scope is identified as a priority, the central team will contact the CRG directly, or via the Network Associate or Senior Editors, to consider:

- how the review fits within the CRG’s current portfolio of reviews;
- whether it should be pursued as a rapid review or a standard Cochrane Review;
- what input and refinement might be needed to define the scope;
- whether there is an author team in place, and whether they have the necessary expertise and resources to complete the review;
• whether additional input or clarification needs to be sought (e.g. via the Methods Support Unit, clinical experts, or a Methods Group).

If the CRG scope under which the question falls is unclear, or the CRG does not have the capacity to lead or support the editorial process, the central team will discuss the situation with the Network Associate Editor and/or Senior Editor. Reviews may be managed as a collaboration between a CRG and the central team or by another CRGs in the network. Alternatively, the author team will be informed that the title cannot currently be pursued.

**Q What is the process when author teams want to pursue questions from the Question Bank that are relevant to a CRG, but have not been prioritized?**

The central team will contact the CRG directly, or through the Network Associate or Senior Editors, to consider the same factors as outlined above for a priority review, and a joint decision will be made about whether the title should be pursued. Author teams wanting to pursue titles before they have been prioritized, or that are not considered high priority, are informed that:

- Cochrane is focusing limited editorial and methodological resources on reviews that are already in the editorial process, but will consider reviews if:
  - the review is prospectively registered on PROSPERO or the Open Science Framework (OSF);
  - a protocol is prepared in the template and either submitted in advance for high level comment, or submitted with the final review;
  - the review is conducted in accordance with the methods recommended by the Cochrane Rapid Reviews Methods Group;
  - the review is prepared according to the minimum reporting standards outlined in our full review template (available [here](#)).
- submitting and pursuing a question does not constitute title registration and, while we are making every effort to reduce duplication by marking questions as underway, we cannot prevent other teams from conducting related work;
- all submitted reviews will undergo a series of early checks, and may be subject to revision or rejection; the editorial turnaround will depend on the number of priority reviews in the editorial process.

**Q Who decides whether a CRG or the Editorial Service leads the editorial process?**

The central team is increasing capacity to manage the editorial process for reviews identified as high priority, and has designed a resource-intensive ‘fast-track’ style editorial process to move from submission to publication within two weeks. The turnaround requires advance planning (e.g. sourcing peer reviewers), parallel processes and dedicated methods, clinical and editorial support. There is no expectation that CRGs will need to manage similarly fast processes, so caution is advised about taking on rapid reviews. If the central team approaches a CRG about a proposed rapid review that falls within its scope, the decision to take it forwards should include consideration of realistic timelines for the production and editorial process, to establish expectations for everyone involved.

**Q What should CRGs do if they receive review proposals relevant to COVID-19?**

CRGs are free to pursue review proposals, as they would normally, but should consult the Question Bank to check whether related reviews are underway first. CRGs that are pursuing reviews relevant to COVID-19 should contact the central team via covidrapidreviews@cochrane.org so that details (including whether these are standard or rapid reviews) can be included on the Question Bank to inform other teams.

If the title has not been through the central prioritization process, and the CRG does not have capacity to lead the editorial process (either as standard or rapid review), the central team can use the information collected about editorial capacity to consider whether another CRG in the network could support the
editorial process instead. The Editorial Service will only be able to manage the editorial process when a review is identified as high priority. The central team can provide advice to the CRG and identify resources and guidance with a view to expediting the editorial process.

**Q What should CRGs do when they have conducted a prioritization process and identified one or more titles related to COVID-19 that they want to pursue?**

CRGs should contact the central team via covidrapidreviews@cochrane.org, so they can document the titles on the Question Bank and mark them as underway. CRGs with capacity to lead the reviews in-house are free to do so. If the titles have not been through wider prioritization and the CRG does not have capacity to lead them (either as standard or rapid review), the central team can use the information collected about editorial capacity to consider whether another CRG in the network can support the editorial process. The Editorial Service will only be able to manage the editorial process if a review is identified as high priority. The central team can provide advice to the CRG and identify resources and guidance with a view to expediting the editorial process.

**Q What should CRGs do when they want to help, but do not have any reviews related to COVID-19 they wish to pursue?**

CRGs in this position should complete the survey that was circulated to CRGs to document capacity, and the central team will get in touch if input is needed. Depending on your responses, this may be for a distinct editorial task (e.g. proofreading a PLS or signing off a review), or to use CRG-related expertise to support the author team (e.g. in the use of a novel method to prevent delays further down the line).

**Q What should CRGs do when they are unable to commit to the turnaround required for a rapid review, and non-COVID reviews in their editorial process are stalling due to decreased capacity in the group and/or editors on the front-line?**

There is no expectation for CRGs to take on extra work during this time, and each CRG should decide their own balance between their usual workload and COVID-19 related work. If the central team approaches a CRG to ask if it has capacity to lead or support the editorial process and it is not able to, alternative options can be explored that will suit the CRG’s capacity and make the most of its expertise.

**Q Can we still submit reviews to the Editorial Service?**

Currently the Editorial Service is focussing on COVID-19 reviews, but we would advise that CRGs contact us about non-COVID-19 reviews they would otherwise plan to send to the service during this time. We do not want to discourage non-COVID content, and can explore how we might work with you to support the production of such reviews.