

Cochrane Fields

This information was transferred from the old Organizational Policy Manual in December 2016. The content has not yet been updated in light of [Structure & Function](#) reforms that are proposed for Cochrane Fields, but updates to terminology (e.g. Information Specialists to Information Specialists) have been made.

A Cochrane Field is a Group which focuses on a dimension of health care other than a specific healthcare problem - such as the setting of care, the type of consumer, the type of provider, the type of intervention, or a major division of health care which embraces an area too large to be covered by a single Review Group – and represents its interests.

Most Cochrane Review Groups are essentially problem-based; they exist to prepare and maintain systematic reviews on specific health care problems. However, there are a number of other dimensions of health care that cannot be usefully conceptualised as 'health problems' such as the setting of care (e.g. primary care), the type of patient/consumer (e.g. older persons), or the type of intervention (e.g. vaccines).

Wishing both to draw upon the support existing in these areas of health care and to ensure that their needs are taken into account when producing and promoting access to Cochrane reviews, Cochrane has another type of Group in order to reflect the interests of these dimensions, or 'fields', of health care more effectively. This concept also applies to those major divisions of health care embracing areas too large to be covered by a single Review Group (e.g. cancer). Groups such as these are called either Fields or Networks; in this section, they are referred to as 'Fields'.

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1. The role of Cochrane Fields

The role of Fields is to facilitate the work of Review Groups and to ensure that Cochrane Reviews appropriate to their area of interest are both relevant and accessible to their fellow specialists and consumers. Given the breadth of its area of interest, each Cochrane Field may expect to support, and contribute to, the work of a number of Review Groups. Fields do not prepare or maintain reviews. However, individual members of Fields can, and do, prepare and maintain reviews as members of Cochrane Review Groups.

2. Core functions of Fields

A. CORE FUNCTIONS

(This section was updated by the Cochrane Operations Unit (now 'Central Executive Team') on 19 September 2011, as the result of the Operations and Finance Committee approval of certain changes, on 2 August 2011)

Advocacy for evidence-based health care

All Fields must carry out the activities in the following Sections I and II, and at least one activity from Section III.

I. Relation with Field's constituents

In order for Fields to carry out their 'bridging' work, they must have strong relationships in place with Cochrane Groups and with external stakeholders within their area of specialty. All Fields, therefore, must be able to

demonstrate that they are building and maintaining relationships with relevant Cochrane Groups and with external stakeholders, including practitioners, policy-makers, and healthcare users/consumers in the Field's area. The metric to demonstrate the Field's support from its area of health care should be chosen *a priori* by the Field itself in its business plan, and may be one or more of the following: number of members, measurable support from professional organizations, international partnerships, or funding support.

II Recognition of Field's systematic reviews

Each Field is responsible for identifying and tagging in Archie (Cochrane's Information Management System) the reviews, protocols and titles that are relevant to the Field's scope. This work serves three purposes. First, tagging serves as a communication mechanism with Cochrane Review Groups that the Field is interested in, and willing to support as possible, particular reviews. Second, it permits the Field to generate a list of Cochrane reviews, protocols and titles that are relevant to its scope. This list can then be disseminated to stakeholders. Third, it enables the Field to identify gaps in Cochrane evidence readily.

III. Dissemination activities

Activities by which Fields will carry out their mission of advocacy may also include one or more of the following, as chosen by an individual Field based on its scope and resources:

- a) Reformatting or summarizing Cochrane Reviews within the Field's scope and disseminating these summaries to stakeholders;
- b) Advising or assisting authors of reviews within the Field's scope with publishing Cochrane Reviews in journal article format in specialist journals;
- c) Working with stakeholders to identify priorities for review topics, and bringing these priority topics to the attention of Cochrane Review Groups.

B. ELECTIVE FUNCTIONS

Each Field must carry out at least one activity from this section. Fields will choose one or more of the following areas in which to focus their efforts. This choice will be identified *a priori* in the Field's business plan, and the Field's work in the area(s) of choice will be recorded in its reports to the Cochrane Monitoring and Registration Committee.

- 1) To promote the production of relevant and high-quality systematic reviews, in conjunction with Cochrane Review Groups, through one or more of the following activities:
 - a) Providing resources (time and/or money) for the production of systematic reviews within the Field's scope;
 - b) Submitting to the appropriate Review Groups registrations for review titles or review updates on topics within the Field's scope;
 - c) Maintaining a register of trials within the Field's scope, and submitting this register to CENTRAL;
 - d) Introducing, supporting or linking to Review Groups editors, peer reviewers, or authors with Field-relevant expertise.
- 2) To train those in the Field's area of expertise about Cochrane reviews, and to train those in Cochrane about the Field's content, in conjunction with Cochrane Centres, through one or more of the following activities:
 - a) Training stakeholders in the production or interpretation of systematic reviews within the Field's scope;
 - b) Training stakeholders in interpretation of systematic reviews within the Field's scope;
 - c) Providing training to persons involved in production of systematic reviews about specific issues (for example, characteristics of the interventions or population represented by the Field) relevant to reviews within the Field's scope.
- 3) To participate in the development of methods for the production or dissemination of evidence-based medicine, in conjunction with Cochrane Methods Groups, through one or more of the following activities:
 - a) Conducting methodological work addressing the PICOS (population, intervention, comparison, outcome, study design) relevant to the Field's scope;
 - b) Developing and disseminating methods for identifying evidence within the Field's scope (e.g. search filters);
 - c) Conducting methodological work in development of methods for overviews of reviews within the Field's scope;

- d) Conducting methodological work that will maximise dissemination of information to users of reviews (i.e. knowledge translation research).

C. THE FUNCTIONING OF COCHRANE FIELDS

The principal contact person in each Field is its Field Co-ordinator. Given the differences in terrain* between each Field, not all Fields will necessarily allot equal weight to each function. It is the responsibility of a Field Co-ordinator to allocate the Field's time and resources to those functions that most effectively fulfil the Field's role as a support to the Review Groups, and to Cochrane as a whole.

The term terrain is used in this section to denote the range of variable factors operating in a particular area of health care (e.g. levels of awareness, needs, opportunities for action, obstacles to progress, professional considerations etc.) that might influence the direction and/or performance of a Cochrane Field.

D. IDENTIFYING TRIALS AND DEVELOPING A SPECIALISED REGISTER

A good review requires the identification of as many studies relevant to its topic as possible. Fields support the review process by searching their specialist sources, identifying reports of studies that appear to meet the Cochrane criteria for controlled trials (irrespective of their subject matter), and making them accessible to Cochrane through CENTRAL. At the same time, Fields also provide a valuable service for their own dimension of health care by establishing and developing a specialised register of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) drawn from CENTRAL, containing all the RCTs relevant to its area of interest that have been identified by Cochrane and others, and by ensuring its publication in *The Cochrane Library*.

IDENTIFYING TRIALS

Fields are responsible for co-ordinating the searches within their specialty for studies meeting the Cochrane criteria for inclusion in the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL). This entails instigating and co-ordinating:

- full text ('hand searches') of journals
- electronic searches of specialist databases
- searches of specialist grey literature (e.g. conference abstracts and proceedings, pharmaceutical industry, university theses)
- searches for unpublished trials

DEVELOPING A SPECIALISED REGISTER

Identifying reports of trials relevant to its dimension of health care and making them accessible through specialised registers within the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL) is a core requirement of Fields.

The construction of an authoritative register of randomized controlled trials tailored to the needs of a particular dimension of health care establishes a valuable resource. There is no need for individuals who are in the process of forming a Cochrane Field to wait until the Field has been registered with Cochrane before assembling a register of randomized controlled trials. This essential task can and should be pursued concurrently with efforts to establish a Cochrane Field in their dimension of health care. A substantial and reliable Register of Trials establishes the Field's credibility amongst its professional peers, legitimises its position as a key source for evidence for individuals and organisations who have an interest in the conduct of literature searches for RCTs and may offer the first material benefit for users of *The Cochrane Library* seeking helpful information related to its particular area of care.

[For a good description of the steps taken by a Field to assemble a specialised register of RCTs, see Silagy C. Developing a register of randomised controlled trials in primary health care. *BMJ* 1993; 306:897-900.]

E. ENSURING PROPER REPRESENTATION ON COCHRANE REVIEW GROUPS

Ensuring that Cochrane Review Groups covering areas of health care of interest to their Field have sufficient editors or authors, and that their Field is properly represented, are important and ongoing responsibilities of Fields. For example, the Primary Health Care Field has ensured that there is appropriate representation of general practitioners within the Cochrane Pregnancy and Childbirth Group; the interests of the Rehabilitation and Related Therapies Field are similarly represented within the Cochrane Stroke Group. Fields should continuously seek to identify opportunities for individuals working within their area of care, or consumers who have an interest in the

area, to become contributors to Cochrane Review Groups. In order to do this effectively, Field Co-ordinators need to be familiar with the Scope statements and Topic Lists of all registered and possible Cochrane Review Groups so that they know which Groups will be producing systematic reviews relevant to their Field.

Where the appropriate Cochrane Review Groups either have not yet been formed, or are in the process of forming, the Field acts as a source of support and encouragement. One of the first acts of a Field is the creation and maintenance of a database of individuals and organisations that have already expressed an interest in supporting the preparation, maintenance or dissemination of Cochrane Reviews relevant to the dimension of care the Field represents. This allows the Field to identify like-minded individuals who share a common interest in a particular set of health care problems. By organising, or helping to initiate one or more pre-Exploratory meetings and supplying the necessary materials and guidance, a Field can make a useful contribution to individuals wishing to form a Cochrane Review Group. For example, the Cochrane Cancer Network has helped six Cochrane Review Groups to form in this way. Whenever possible, relevant Fields should be represented at the Cochrane Review Group's Formal Exploratory Meeting.

Once a new Cochrane Review Group is registered with Cochrane, a Field may continue to support its development, using its knowledge of Cochrane and its experience gained with other Groups for the benefit of the new Cochrane Review Group. It may help to identify and meet some of the training needs of members of the new Group. If resources permit, it might also be able to offer office space temporarily to individual authors.

F. ACTING AS A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION

Fields represent the interests of their particular dimensions of care within Cochrane and promote its aims and work within their dimensions of care.

G. PROMOTING THE HEALTH CARE INTERESTS OF FIELDS WITHIN COCHRANE

Fields can promote the interests of their Field by:

- ensuring proper representation on Cochrane Review Groups
- encouraging comments on Cochrane Reviews by inviting individuals and organisations within their dimension of health care to access *The Cochrane Library* and make use of its Feedback facility
- working with other Fields to help initiate reviews in which they share a common interest.
- initiating meetings or discussions between individuals and organisations within their dimension of health care and Cochrane, directors of Cochrane Centers or co-ordinating editors of Cochrane Review Groups
- eliciting contributions to Cochrane newsletter or other Cochrane publications from relevant individuals and organisations

H. PROMOTING THE AIMS AND WORK OF COCHRANE WITHIN THE FIELD

Fields promote the aims and work of Cochrane by:

- organising meetings or making presentations at key conferences
- submitting articles about Cochrane and the work of the Cochrane Field to leading journals in their area of health care. [For a good example of this, see Jefferson T. Vaccine trial data systematically assembled, pooled and disseminated by Cochrane. *Vaccine* 1998; 16:1487-1495]
- using the auspices of organisations in their area of health care to promote the works of Cochrane through meetings or newsletters (e.g. the Primary Health Care Field's regular column in 'WONCA News', the newsletter of the World Organisation of National Colleges and Assemblies of Family Medicine)
- disseminating notices of Cochrane protocols and reviews and news of Cochrane activities through its own newsletter or website
- maintaining links with individuals and organisations on its contacts database

I. PREPARING SPECIALISED DATABASES OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

Fields help Cochrane to promote the accessibility of its reviews by preparing specialised databases of reviews targeted at users in its particular area of health care.

Note: This section of the Field entry to the *Manual* will be modified as experience in this area of Cochrane Collaboration activity grows.

J. IDENTIFYING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

By the nature of the activities described above, Fields occasionally find themselves in a position not only to help Cochrane Review Groups identify trials and recruit new authors but also indirectly to provide them with more material support. This may range from supplying letters of support for funding applications, through the establishment of bursaries to sustain authors, to the intentional pursuit of promising opportunities for securing funding. Field Co-ordinators should encourage Co-ordinating Editors of Cochrane Review Groups to keep them apprised of opportunities where Field support would be helpful.

Because they are global Groups operating on a wider stage than Cochrane Centres and because, unlike Cochrane Review Groups, they do not have the burden of preparing or maintaining reviews, Fields enjoy a greater capability to investigate funding opportunities not usually available, directly or indirectly, to other Cochrane Groups. Field members have a responsibility to be on the lookout for opportunities for funding Cochrane Reviews and to communicate these to the appropriate Cochrane Review Groups.

3. Establishing a Field

[Please refer to the Cochrane Community site for information on establishing new Groups, and making changes to existing Groups.](#)

A. UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FIELDS AND OTHER COCHRANE GROUPS

Before establishing a Field it is useful not only to understand the defining characteristics of Fields but also to recognise the difference between Fields and other types of Cochrane Groups:

FIELDS AND COCHRANE REVIEW GROUPS

Fields provide a range of services (described above) that enable Cochrane Review Groups to provide a product: relevant, high quality systematic reviews.

Most Cochrane Review Groups are essentially problem-based. Their attention is necessarily focused around the relatively narrow band of health care issues defined in their Scope statements. Fields have the responsibility for representing the interests of broad dimensions of health care and promoting the aims and work of Cochrane within these areas. Their objectives, and their approach to achieving them, are therefore necessarily more diffuse than those of Cochrane Review Groups.

Although they are looking at different healthcare problems, all Cochrane Review Groups essentially operate in the same way. They observe an established procedure for preparing and maintaining reviews and work to the same methodological and performance quality criteria. The terrain of its own particular area of health care largely determines the way a Field operates. Not all Fields will give equal weight to the functions described above, nor will they be able to use the same strategies to achieve their objectives. Indeed, goals will differ from Field to Field, dependant on what the Field Co-ordinator feels can realistically be achieved.

FIELDS AND COCHRANE CENTRES

Fields and Cochrane Centres complement and counterbalance each other's work. Like Fields, Cochrane Centres do not produce reviews but provide a range of services designed to support Cochrane Review Groups and facilitate the systematic review process.

One of the many responsibilities of Cochrane Centres is to serve as a source of information about Cochrane and to provide support for Cochrane contributors from all areas of health care within a defined geographical region. Fields serve as sources of information about Cochrane, and provide support to people becoming involved with Cochrane, from all geographical regions, within a defined area of health care.

Similarly, a number of Cochrane Centres are responsible for searching general medical journals published in their geographical region. Fields accept the responsibility for co-ordinating searches of the general specialist journals. These efforts allow the Cochrane Review Groups to refine their search strategies still further and concentrate on searching a smaller number of specialist journals pertinent to their area.

Cochrane Centres are also responsible for the performance and output of Review Groups within their geographical region and for promoting accessibility to *The Cochrane Library* to healthcare professionals, consumers and others.

Fields have a corresponding responsibility to help ensure that the Cochrane Review Groups prepare and maintain high quality systematic reviews appropriate to their special dimension of health care and that these systematic reviews are accessible to their fellow specialists and consumers.

B. DESIGNING THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD

The structure of the Field will depend on the terrain of the Field and the direction set by the Field Director (title changed from 'Co-ordinator' in August 2011). Experience suggests that the success of a Field will depend upon a number of different factors, but particularly on the commitment of the individuals prepared to act as Field Directors, and their determination to ensure that the Field has sufficient resources to achieve its objectives. Field direction, because of the challenge to achieve cohesion, may require determined and firm leadership, but this should be exercised sensitively. A brief description of the responsibilities of some of the key players that might be involved is included below. Not all Fields will have the need for all these posts.

The Field Director

The Field Director has the following responsibilities:

- to set and maintain the direction and scope of the Field
- to allocate the Field's resources in the way most appropriate to the achievement of its goals
- to promote the aims and work of Cochrane within the Field's area of care
- to develop and maintain links with organisations outside Cochrane
- to develop and maintain links with the co-ordinating editors of all relevant Cochrane Review Groups
- to develop and maintain links with all Cochrane Centres and Cochrane Fields
- to attend Cochrane Colloquia and regularly report progress and developments in the Field to Cochrane
- to seek and secure sufficient funding to enable the Field to function effectively

The Field Co-ordinator (title changed from 'Administrator' in August 2011)

The Field Co-ordinator may have the following responsibilities:

- to provide the Field Director with administrative support
- to help organise meetings and promotional workshops
- to prepare and maintain the Field module in *The Cochrane Library*
- to co-ordinate the submission of the Field Monitoring document
- to prepare and produce a Field newsletter and/or maintain a Field website
- to maintain the Field database of contacts
- to liaise with the Managing Editors to ensure that the Field is properly represented in the appropriate Cochrane Review Groups

The Field Information Specialist

The Field Information Specialist may have the following responsibilities:

- to identify studies trials relevant to the Field and makes them accessible through CENTRAL
- to co-ordinate searches of the general Field literature, based on a ranked listing of sources to be searched
- to draw up search strategies for CENTRAL and other electronic databases
- to maintain a specialised register of trials
- The Specialised Database Co-ordinator
- The Specialised Database Co-ordinator may have the following responsibilities:
 - to liaise with all Cochrane Groups linked to the Field
 - to co-ordinate the inclusion of data from the Groups associated with the Field
 - to establish links with other relevant organisations providing information for the database
 - to work with electronic publishers to develop, produce and maintain the database
 - to collaborate with others to disseminate the database

Regional representatives

It might be desirable to have one or more regional representatives to assist the Field Director, by spreading the workload of the Field more evenly around the world. Regional representatives can undertake some of the responsibilities outlined above on behalf of the Field Director at a national or regional level (for example, liaising with relevant national or regional organisations) and perform the role of Acting Field Director in times of illness or crisis. Funding would also be required to assist regional representatives to meet their responsibilities. Field Advisory Board.

A Field might also find it useful to form an Advisory Board to advise and assist the Field Director. Although composition of such a group is likely to vary from Field to Field, an Advisory Board should consist of individuals who are committed to the aims and principles of Cochrane, and reflect the international nature of Cochrane and the broad area of the field. They should include at least one consumer representative and one representative from a Review Group with active links to the Field.

C. OBTAINING RESOURCES FOR FIELDS

The support needed for Fields is likely to vary, depending on the priorities set by the Field Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator of a fully functioning Field may require the support of the 2-4 people described above, as well as possible part-time secretarial support.

Office space and equipment will be required, as well as some supplies and services (e.g. telephone and e-mail services, stationery, photocopying, computer supplies, database searching, purchase of key journals, printing newsletters). Travel funds will be needed for meetings, workshops and conferences.

Funding may also be required to assist regional representatives to meet their responsibilities and to allow members of a Field Advisory Board to attend meetings.