The Cochrane Collaboration's Strategic Planning Framework

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Submitted to: The Steering Group meeting on 17th March and the Collaboration's Mid-Year Meeting Strategic Session on 20th March 2013

Purpose: To map and then analyse The Cochrane Collaboration's existing strategic framework, propose potential changes, and recommend the appropriate strategic planning exercise for the Collaboration to begin in 2013 – including the focus of the strategic planning session at the mid-year business meetings in Oxford in March.

Urgency: High.

Access: This is an open access paper.

Background:

1.   One of the CCSG's strategic priority tasks in 2012-13 was to complete a new five-year strategy for the Collaboration. This work was not able to begin, however, because of the interim nature of 2012 with an Acting CEO in position until late in the year and the senior leadership's focus on negotiating the future publishing contract. A decision was taken to await the arrival of the new CEO in November 2012; and following the final agreement and signing of the new publishing contract with Wiley in late January 2013 it was only in February that I was able to turn to the strategic planning project in order to make best use of the session on strategic planning at the Collaboration's mid-year meetings in Oxford in March.

2.   This document is therefore a relatively brief assessment of the Collaboration's existing strategic framework and some initial ideas on how it might be developed, refocused and improved. The goal has been to set out a pragmatic strategic planning process for 2013 that builds on the on-going work around the 2008-09 'Strategic Review' recommendations and focuses on the most important areas of change I believe are needed.

3.   This document is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis at every level of the Collaboration's strategic positioning and future priorities and development.

Proposals and Discussion:

Mapping the Collaboration's existing strategic framework

3.   The essential first task in a strategic planning exercise is to analyse what strategic framework is already in place for the Collaboration and determine how much of the existing strategic objectives and plans sit well within it as a useful guide to action and priority setting. The table below is therefore an attempt to map the existing strategic framework that The Cochrane Collaboration already has in place:

The Cochrane Collaboration's existing strategic framework

Vision
Our vision is that healthcare decision-making throughout the world will be informed by high-quality, timely research evidence.

Mission
The Cochrane Collaboration is an international organisation that aims to help people make well-informed decisions about healthcare by preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of healthcare interventions.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: To ensure high quality Cochrane systematic reviews are available across a broad range of healthcare topics.	**Goal 2: To promote access to Cochrane reviews and the other products of The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**Goal 3: To ensure an efficient, transparent organisational structure and management system for The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**Goal 4: To achieve sustainability of The Cochrane Collaboration.**

2005 Strategic Priorities

To ensure high quality in Cochrane reviews	To improve retrieval of information from Cochrane databases	To ensure that the organisational focus supports the core function of preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of reviews	To ensure an adequate income stream for The Cochrane Collaboration
To ensure that Cochrane Reviews are easy to understand	To promote effective communication with people outside The Cochrane Collaboration	To ensure that all decision-making processes within The Cochrane Collaboration are transparent and explicit	To develop a business plan for the core activities of The Cochrane Collaboration
To ensure broad coverage of healthcare topics in Cochrane reviews		To promote effective communication within The Cochrane Collaboration	To recognise and support the efforts of individuals in The Cochrane Collaboration
Diagnostic test accuracy activity			

2008 Strategic Review Recommendations

Reaffirm our primary purpose to be the production of systematic reviews	Develop a Marketing and Communications Strategy to promote external and internal awareness of the value arguments for and achievements of The Cochrane Collaboration	Establish formal membership for its contributors.	Identify principles for developing new products or lines of activity.
Investigate the development of a responsive review program.	Identify principles for developing new products or lines of activity	Establish an External Advisory Board	Invest in a development function for new products or lines of activities

Improve the usability of *The Cochrane Library* and other products for diverse stakeholders		Clarify the roles and responsibilities of its scientific/professional, managerial and editorial leadership	Investigate the development of a broad-based educational programme
Develop a partnership strategy to engage other systematic review producers and knowledge packagers.		Review the membership of the Collaboration Steering Group (CCSG) and its alignment with the purposes of the Collaboration	Acknowledge the reality of our current infrastructure funding model and work to maintain it
Formalise additional purposes including training, methods development and advocacy for evidence-based decision-making and identify responsibilities of entities for these purposes		Define required competencies for CCSG membership and induction and ongoing training for CCSG members.	Explore and pursue new funding opportunities
		Review terms of reference and membership of CCSG Sub-Groups and Advisory Groups	Undertake a formal environmental scan every two to three years
		Enhance accountability mechanisms of entities to ensure core functions are met and Collaboration policies are implemented	Use uncommitted income strategically to develop new products/lines of activity.
		Develop an ongoing and participatory approach to strategy formation	Develop and implement a formal succession planning mechanism for entity leadership.
		Develop and implement central decision-making processes that clearly identify communication, implementation and monitoring plans	
		Review terms of reference, and number and geographic spread of Cochrane entities to ensure efficient alignment with the purposes of the Collaboration.	

2012-13 Strategic Priorities

We will continue to prioritise our support for the Editor in Chief and the CEU as they seek to improve the quality, relevance, usability, and impact of The Cochrane Library.	We will sign off on a new publishing contract for The Cochrane Library which will enhance the use and impact of the Library worldwide, and ensure we can continue to provide core infrastructural support to the Collaboration.	We will appoint a new CEO to provide leadership, vision and high-level management across the Collaboration.	We will seek to develop alternative funding sources (carried over).
We will begin to develop a more author- and user-friendly and efficient approach to the organisation of topics within The Cochrane Library (carried over).	We will improve the dissemination and uptake of our reviews, and enhance our brand, through the implementation of a coherent marketing and communication strategy (carried over).	We will expand the COU to enable it to provide better support for Cochrane groups and individuals worldwide as they seek to implement the vision and mission of the Collaboration.	We will form an external advisory board, and enhance our partnerships with external stakeholders of the Collaboration and The Cochrane Library, such as health information providers, policy-makers and funders (carried over).
		We will enhance our monitoring and management functions, particularly of individuals, groups and platforms which receive core Collaboration funding and/or use the Cochrane brand, primarily through the Editorial and Operations Units, working with relevant executives (c/o).	We will sign off on a new publishing contract for The Cochrane Library which will enhance the use and impact of the Library worldwide, and ensure we can continue to provide core infrastructural support to the Collaboration.
		We will develop a new five-year strategic plan.	We will enhance global participation and relevance of The Cochrane Collaboration and The Cochrane Library

			through the formation of the 'Cochrane Academy' (carried over).
Other We will celebrate our 21st year, and tell the world our story.			We will promote generational change within the organisation, particularly within the leadership, ensuring better global and gender equity.

4.   The '**Vision**' of the organization is set and is a powerful general statement of the world that the Collaboration is striving to bring about. It is far-reaching, powerful and focused.

5.   The '**Mission**' of the organization is much less well used by the Collaboration in its external and internal documentation, and we need to remedy this. The Mission does what it should, in outlining the specific role of the Collaboration in contributing to the realization of its Vision.

6.   The Strategic Plan of 2002 set out four '**Strategic Goals'** that are still in place for the Collaboration. They are:

Goal 1:   To ensure high quality Cochrane systematic reviews are available across a broad range of healthcare topics.
Goal 2:   To promote access to Cochrane reviews and the other products of The Cochrane Collaboration.
Goal 3:   To ensure an efficient, transparent organisational structure and management system for The Cochrane Collaboration.
Goal 4:   To achieve sustainability of The Cochrane Collaboration.

7.   In 2005 the Collaboration reviewed its strategy and established a set of 12 '**Strategic Priorities**' within these four Strategic Goals with a collection of 80 'Activities' below these priorities. The Activities were sometimes highly specific but most were very general and not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Realistic & Time-Bound). These 80 Activities are not included in the table for clarity and ease of reading the 'big picture' but they are attached as an Annex to the Framework document.

8.   In 2008-09 the Collaboration conducted an in-depth Strategic Review of the organization and its activities. This resulted in a set of 25 '**Strategic Recommendations**' around the Collaboration's 'Purpose', 'Brand and Glue', 'Competition', 'Financial viability', 'Accountability and Decision-making', 'Structures and Processes', and 'Communication, advocacy and engagement with external stakeholders'. I have now mapped these recommendations (one or two appear in two equally valid columns) against the Collaboration's Strategic Goals – something I don't think was done in 2009. The number and type of recommendations may or may not accurately reflect the nature of the strategic discussions and conclusions of the 2008-09 review process; but what is immediately very striking is that the overwhelming majority of the Review's recommendations (19 of them) are internally focused (appearing under Goal 3 – on organizational structure, governance and management; or Goal 4 – on internal development to achieve the Collaboration's sustainability). Some of those are externally oriented, such as the development of new products or lines of activities to achieve financial sustainability in Goal 4, but it is obvious that the primary focus of the outcomes of the Review process were inside the Collaboration.

9.   Finally, Collaboration members have recently been affirming the yearly '**Strategic Priorities'** set by the Steering Group to guide its work each year during the organisation's Annual General Meeting. I have mapped the latest set of Priorities for 2012-13 against the Strategic Goals and although the disparity is not quite as great as for the 2008-09 Strategic Recommendations, nine of the 13 priorities are also engaged with mainly internal organisational and sustainability challenges.

Assessing the Collaboration's Achievements on its Strategic Goals and Priorities

10.   The next table in the document attempts to assess the progress of achievement the Collaboration has made since 2009 in implementing and completing the Strategic Review Recommendations and – over the last year – its Strategic Priorities. A basic, admittedly rather crude, traffic light measure has been used:

- A red shading indicates a Recommendation which has not been achieved (marked 'N');
- An orange shading indicates a Recommendation which has begun but not yet completed or was completed soon after 2009 but changed circumstances mean that it now needs further action or is ongoing (marked 'ON');
- A green shading indicates a Recommendation which has been completed or achieved (marked 'C');

Strategic Goals			
Goal 1: To ensure high quality Cochrane systematic reviews are available across a broad range of healthcare topics.	**Goal 2: To promote access to Cochrane reviews and the other products of The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**Goal 3: To ensure an efficient, transparent organisational structure and management system for The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**Goal 4: To achieve sustainability of The Cochrane Collaboration.**
2005 Strategic Priorities			
To ensure high quality in Cochrane reviews	To improve retrieval of information from Cochrane databases	To ensure that the organisational focus supports the core function of preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of reviews	To ensure an adequate income stream for The Cochrane Collaboration
To ensure that Cochrane Reviews are easy to understand	To promote effective communication with people outside The Cochrane Collaboration	To ensure that all decision-making processes within The Cochrane Collaboration are transparent and explicit	To develop a business plan for the core activities of The Cochrane Collaboration
To ensure broad coverage of healthcare topics in Cochrane reviews		To promote effective communication within The Cochrane Collaboration	To recognise and support the efforts of individuals in The Cochrane Collaboration
Diagnostic test accuracy activity			
2008 Strategic Review Recommendations			
Reaffirm our primary purpose to be the production of systematic reviews (COMPLETED – C)	Develop a Marketing and Communications Strategy to promote external and internal awareness of the value arguments for and achievements of The Cochrane Collaboration (ON)	Establish formal membership for its contributors. (NOT ACHIEVED – N)	Identify principles for developing new products or lines of activity. (ONGOING – BEGUN BUT NOT COMPLETED OR COMPLETED BUT NOW NEEDING FURTHER REVIEW - ON)
Investigate the development of a responsive review program. (ON)	Identify principles for developing new products or lines of activity (ON)	Establish an External Advisory Board (N)	Invest in a development function for new products or lines of activities (C)
Improve the usability of *The Cochrane Library* and other products for diverse stakeholders (ON)		Clarify the roles and responsibilities of its scientific/professional, managerial and editorial leadership (ON)	Investigate the development of a broad-based educational programme (ON).
Develop a partnership strategy to engage other systematic review producers and knowledge packagers. (ON)		Review the membership of the Collaboration Steering Group (CCSG) and its alignment with the purposes of the Collaboration (ON)	Acknowledge the reality of our current infrastructure funding model and work to maintain it (ON)
Formalise additional purposes including training,		Define required competencies for CCSG	Explore and pursue new funding opportunities (ON)

methods development and advocacy for evidence-based decision-making and identify responsibilities of entities for these purposes (ON)		membership and induction and ongoing training for CCSG members. (ON)	
		Review terms of reference and membership of CCSG Sub-Groups and Advisory Groups (C)	Undertake a formal environmental scan every two to three years (N)
		Enhance accountability mechanisms of entities to ensure core functions are met and Collaboration policies are implemented (ON)	Use uncommitted income strategically to develop new products/lines of activity. (ON)
		Develop an ongoing and participatory approach to strategy formation (ON)	Develop and implement a formal succession planning mechanism for entity leadership. (ON)
		Develop and implement central decision-making processes that clearly identify communication, implementation and monitoring plans (ON)	
		Review terms of reference, and number and geographic spread of Cochrane entities to ensure efficient alignment with the purposes of the Collaboration. (N)	

2012-13 Strategic Priorities

We will continue to prioritise our support for the Editor in Chief and the CEU as they seek to improve the quality, relevance, usability, and impact of The Cochrane Library. (C)	We will sign off on a new publishing contract for The Cochrane Library which will enhance the use and impact of the Library worldwide, and ensure we can continue to provide core infrastructural support to the Collaboration. (C)	We will appoint a new CEO to provide leadership, vision and high-level management across the Collaboration. (C)	We will seek to develop alternative funding sources (carried over). (ON)
We will begin to develop a more author- and user-friendly and efficient approach to the organisation of topics within The Cochrane Library (carried over). (C)	We will improve the dissemination and uptake of our reviews, and enhance our brand, through the implementation of a coherent marketing and communication strategy (carried over). (N)	We will expand the COU to enable it to provide better support for Cochrane groups and individuals worldwide as they seek to implement the vision and mission of the Collaboration. (ON)	We will form an external advisory board, and enhance our partnerships with external stakeholders of the Collaboration and The Cochrane Library, such as health information providers, policy-makers and funders (carried over). (N)
		We will enhance our monitoring and management functions, particularly of individuals, groups and platforms which receive core Collaboration funding and/or use the Cochrane brand, primarily through the Editorial and Operations Units, working with relevant executives (c/o). (ON)	We will sign off on a new publishing contract for The Cochrane Library which will enhance the use and impact of the Library worldwide, and ensure we can continue to provide core infrastructural support to the Collaboration. (C)
		We will develop a new five-year strategic plan. (ON)	We will enhance global participation and relevance of The Cochrane Collaboration and The Cochrane Library through the formation of the 'Cochrane Academy' (carried over). (ON)
Other We will celebrate our 21st year, and tell the world our story (ON).			We will promote generational change within the organisation, particularly within the leadership, ensuring better global and gender equity. (N)

11.   Some of the scoring may be incorrect (it is drawn from discussions with Secretariat staff and the Co-Chairs) but it is clear that many of the recommendations are still to be achieved, with seven very far from completion and others with much work still to be done. It does not appear that any of the recommendations are no longer important to implement – in fact many are framed very generally and would remain ongoing necessities - so although the Strategic Review was published four years ago this set of strategic recommendations have continuing validity and a considerable distance to travel to completion.

12.   The achievement of the strategic priorities for 2012-13 is much better. Work on marketing and communications plans was begun and then stopped for the new CEO to take on; and work on promoting generational change within the organisation, development of alternate funding sources, and creating an external advisory board to support the Steering Group are still to begin properly. However, all of the other strategic priorities could be said to have been met or well under way, with many of the ongoing priorities clearly of major strategic significance and requiring a great deal more time to achieve (such as expansion of the COU; improving management and monitoring; global capacity-building in the production of systematic reviews).

Thoughts on a Strategic Planning exercise in 2013:

13.   My conclusion from this analysis, therefore, is that the Collaboration has a reasonable strategic framework in place, but that it needs to be updated and refreshed, with two critically important areas of change to take place:

Focusing externally

14.   I would invite the Collaboration to look again at its mission in terms of defining its place in the world and its ambitions over the next decade in order to do more to bring about its vision that 'healthcare decision-making throughout the world will be informed by high-quality, timely research evidence'. What would that mean? My vision for the Collaboration is more than that set out in the present Mission statement. I want 'Cochrane' to become the 'go to' organisation for everything to do with healthcare systematic reviews: when anybody anywhere thinks about systematic reviews in the field of healthcare, they think 'Cochrane'. I want the Collaboration to become a global leader in the promotion of evidence-based medicine, much more influential in health policymaking, and much more focused on the users and the uses of our products rather than simple production of systematic reviews.

15.   This means that our strategy needs to address much more comprehensively the Collaboration's *external place and profile* in the world; on our *content not only in terms of its quality* (which must remain the basis of all of our actions) *but its application*. What are our specific ambitions to reach new and more audiences, and to influence policy-makers? How can we focus more on the external impact of our organisation and our products and less on the mechanics of the production? How can we respond better to the priorities of others in what, when and why we produce reviews; and how we respond to a revolution in information technology to ensure that our information is seen and used over that produced by others? How and what are the best partnerships to ensure that we build on our strengths, cover our weaknesses and attain wider, deeper global reach?

Becoming more supportive and efficient internally

16.   This altered strategic focus externally will mean that the internal concerns and recommendations of the Strategic Review must be addressed and completed soon. As discussed above, the recommendations (and improvements implementation of them would bring) remain important strategic priorities for the Collaboration, but we should be more specific in setting out the targets to be reached.

17.   I think the Collaboration needs to become more coherent and efficient, in its internal organisation and ways of working; not to dampen the creativity, innovation and dynamism that are the unique characteristics and strengths of the Collaboration but to make them more powerful. Improving our governance, strengthening our management structures, supporting our overworked volunteers and engaging them more effectively will enable us to meet the external challenges in the healthcare and information management sectors that we face. We need to change the author experience as well as the user experience for the better: to try to make the authoring process less intimidating and drawn out; to shorten the production times, and learn from best practice within the Collaboration's Review Groups and other entities in providing more consistent support to authors.

Implications on strategic planning:

18.   My recommendation is that in the Collaboration's mid-year meetings in Oxford in March the strategic planning session should begin work on a new 'Strategy to 2020' for the Collaboration focusing on several areas.

1. The Collaboration's 'Vision' statement should be left unchanged, but that the strategic planning exercise addresses its 'Mission' statement. The existing statement is tightly focused and well written, but it begs the question as to whether it is too tightly focused around 'preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews' given its ambitions and its potential wider role in promoting evidence-based healthcare decision-making (see argument above).

2. Four Working Groups should look at revising the existing four Strategic Goals – keeping their central focus but considering amendments to meet the latest and future challenges (see notes below for more details). In addition, a fifth Working Group should draft a potential new Strategic Goal specifically addressing our ambitions for our place and profile in the world in the next decade.

3. If time permits, these groups could then suggest the key strategic priorities that should be considered under each of the five Strategic Goals (for initial framing see notes below).

4. This work would then be shared with the wider Collaboration and a process of consultation undertaken for further development and drafting of the Mission/Goals and priorities. They would also be tested with external stakeholders (including funders).

5. Preferably, after a period of extensive consultation, a draft Strategic Plan could be prepared for discussion and ratification at the AGM at the Collaboration's Quebec Colloquium in September 2013. If more time is needed further strategic consultation and discussion could take place in Quebec with a target of finishing a new Strategic Plan in early 2014.

6. The central Secretariat would then establish an operational plan to deliver the strategy with measurable targets on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Proposed Work – March 2013

(New work highlighted in light tint)

Vision
Our vision is that healthcare decision-making throughout the world will be informed by high-quality, timely research evidence.
Mission
ᴛhe Cochrane Collaboration is an international organisation that aims to help people make well-informed decisions about healthcare by preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of healthcare interventions.
Comment / Proposal
Assess the external challenges over the coming decade for the Collaboration and consider amending the Mission statement to reflect an organisation which is global, which focuses more on accessibility and use, and possibly other elements from the re-development of strategic goals (below)
Strategic Goals

Goal 1:	Goal 2:	Goal 3:	Goal 4:	Goal 5:
To ensure high quality Cochrane systematic reviews are available across a broad range of healthcare topics.	**To promote access to Cochrane reviews and the other products of The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**External Focus**	**To ensure an efficient, transparent organisational structure and management system for The Cochrane Collaboration.**	**To achieve sustainability of The Cochrane Collaboration.**
Comment / Proposal				
Expand this Goal by inserting relevance, scope, etc. Also expand the ambition by looking to provide 'high quality Cochrane evidence …'	**An obvious need to highlight the extent of our Goal to Open Access to Cochrane content (not just reviews) & needs to be much more about Usability and**	**We need a Goal setting our ambitions for our place and profile in the world – I would like us to be the 'Go to' organization for systematic reviews. When**	**Rewrite to include what kind of organization we want to be. Well governed; inclusive; membership organization; voluntary; effective and efficiently managed.**	**This Goal seems to me to be still relevant as it is – Detail to be included in the Strategic Objectives.**

	Impact on use.	**people think 'SRs' they think 'Cochrane' and to be a leading organization in evidence-based medicine.**		
Strategic Priorities/Objectives to 2020				
Strategic Priorities to highlight fewer, better systematic reviews	Strategic Priorities need to highlight specific reach and impact to individual audiences (clinicians, patients/consumers, etc) in their healthcare decision-making.	Strategic Priorities to highlight the advocacy, external affairs positioning; the geographical reach and international policy influence; and the capacity-building in spread of EBM.	Strategic Priorities to pick up the organizational characteristics/targets we are reaching for; and the character/culture of the Collaboration.	Strategic priorities to pick up on the adequate, **diversified** set of income streams; and internal skills and competencies.
SP 1:	SP 1:	SP 1:	SP 1:	SP 1:

Resource Implications:

19.   There are no immediate resource implications, although the strategic planning process in 2013 will have to be costed once the CCSG and the mid-year meeting have set the terms of the exercise for the Secretariat.

Mark G Wilson
21st February 2013