

# Developing methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews

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## Why is this document needed?

Cochrane first published the [Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#) in 1994 and version 6 was launched in October 2019. The *Handbook* details the methods and expectations for conducting Cochrane Reviews of interventions and provides the context and evidence for recommended methods. Concise [Methodological Expectations for Cochrane Intervention Reviews \(MECIR\)](#) are embedded throughout the chapters and a collated list of all MECIR standards is also available as a separate resource.

Intervention Reviews remain the most common type of Cochrane review, but Cochrane diagnostic test accuracy (DTA) have been supported since 2007 and other review types and methods have since been deemed appropriate for use in Cochrane Reviews. Non-intervention review types and methods require unique approaches and guidance. Development of a *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Diagnostic Test Accuracy* is underway, led by the [Screening and Diagnostic Tests Methods Group](#), and there is growing interest for guidance about other types of review.

## What we would like to achieve with this document?

Cochrane aims to provide appropriate methods guidance for all review types deemed suitable for use in Cochrane Reviews. In this document, we outline our recommendations for the development, organization, dissemination and maintenance of methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews.

## Who is this document for?

'Developing methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews' is primarily for [Cochrane Methods Groups](#) whose main functions are to:

1. Spearhead methods research and development and act as a bridge between Cochrane and the wider research community;
2. Define best practice and ensure Cochrane guidance for accepted methods is up to date;
3. Support the implementation of new or amended methods by acting as an advisor or through involvement in the methods implementation project itself.

Other methodologists and researchers not formally associated with Cochrane Methods Groups are also welcome to propose changes to methods used in Cochrane (see [here for more details](#)).

## Developing methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews

Individuals or groups looking to develop methods guidance for use in Cochrane Reviews are advised that:

- The proposed methods should be supported by appropriate research evidence;
- All new methods (or tools) need to [be submitted to the Cochrane Scientific Committee for assessment before they can be endorsed by Cochrane](#). The Scientific Committee's assessment is a recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief, who decides whether to approve new methods for piloting, scale-up, or implementation.

We recommend that the evidence for new methods is collated into a resource for Cochrane authors and Cochrane Review Groups (CRGs), ideally organised in a logical way, i.e. the stages of review production (similar to the [Cochrane Handbook of Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#)).

We recommend that this resource is available via the leading (or most relevant) Methods Group's website.

### **Proposing a new Cochrane Handbook**

When the evidence base for the methods is sufficiently comprehensive and there is growing demand from authors and CRGs to apply them in Cochrane Reviews, Methods Groups may wish to propose new Cochrane *Handbooks*.

For the proposal of a new *Handbook* to be considered, the following criteria should be met:

- Cochrane *Handbooks* or *Handbook* chapters must be led or supported by a registered Cochrane Methods Group;
- At least five pilot Cochrane Reviews using the new or adapted method should have been published in the Cochrane Library to test production processes and understand what guidance, tools and training materials are required;
- The *Handbook* team agrees to Cochrane's '[General editorial policies](#)' and other relevant policies from the [Editorial and Publishing Policy Resources](#);
- The *Handbook* team should have capacity to complete the *Handbook* in a reasonable timeframe.

Proposals for a new *Handbook* will be checked by the Editorial Board, Methods Executive and Cochrane Editorial and Methods Department (Methods Team), and will require approval from the Editor in Chief. During *Handbook* development, liaison with the Methods Executive, Editorial Board and the Editor in Chief may be required to ensure content is suitable for its target audience.

New Cochrane *Handbooks* should initially be developed as a virtual resource, usually hosted on the relevant Methods Group website. The steps for proposing a new *Handbook* to Cochrane are as follows:

1. Interested *Handbook* teams completes the proposal form below.
2. Cochrane Editorial and Methods Department (Methods Team) ensures the *Handbook* proposal is appropriate and offers suggested amendments, if relevant;
3. Cochrane Editorial and Methods Department (Methods Team) informs all relevant Cochrane groups of the proposal;
4. *Handbook* proposal discussed with the Methods Executive and Editorial Board to provide a recommendation to the Editor in Chief;
5. Editor-in-Chief's decision of whether to reject or pursue the *Handbook* relayed to the *Handbook* team;
6. If successful, *Handbook* editorial team and Methods Implementation Coordinator work together to outline roles, responsibilities, timelines, workflows and support\* for development of the *Handbook*;
7. Draft chapters shared as PDFs via the Methods Group website, if required – see [this example](#).
8. Finalized *Handbook* hosted on a Cochrane website using the Drupal platform – see [this example](#).

\* Support from Cochrane will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis and could include in-person support from a Managing Editor (position usually filled by the Methods Implementation Coordinator) and/or Editorial Assistant, and/or funding for Editor payments.

\*\* Project management documentation and developing chapters should be hosted in a secure Dropbox folder to which the Handbook editorial team and Methods Implementation Coordinator have shared access.

### **Proposing a hard copy for a new Cochrane Handbook?**

As the content of a virtual *Handbook* develops on the relevant Methods Group's website, Methods Groups may want to propose that it is developed into a hard copy. If the Cochrane Editorial and Methods Department (Methods Team) and Editor-in-Chief approve the proposal, it will be submitted to Cochrane's books series Publisher by the Methods Implementation Coordinator.

Cochrane's book series Publisher (in 2020 this is Wiley with no current plans to change) will then publish the hardcopy of the *Handbook* - see [this example](#).

### **Version control**

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## NEW COCHRANE HANDBOOKS PROPOSAL FORM

If you are interested in developing a new Cochrane *Handbook*, please complete and send the completed form to [methods@cochrane.org](mailto:methods@cochrane.org).

### 1. INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

- i. Main contact for this proposal
- ii. Main Methods Group behind the proposal.
- iii. Proposed Handbook Title:  
*If appropriate, in the format 'Cochrane Handbook for XXX'*
- iv. Names and affiliations of potential Editors  
*Please consider how many Senior Scientific Editors the Handbook might need (generally a maximum of two), and whether it may need Associate Scientific Editor or other types of editor (see Handbook editorial team role descriptions document)*

### 2. DESCRIPTION OF HANDBOOK

*Please provide a brief overview of the Handbook, Methods Groups or other groups involved and the history of its development to date*

### 3. PROVISIONAL LIST OF CONTENTS

*Please provide a provisional list of contents and any key evidence to support the methods. If this has been collated as a resource on a Methods Group's website, please include a link.*

### 4. ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION