

# Methods Executive – 2020 Terms of Reference

## Purpose of Methods Executive

The Methods Executive provides an advisory role to the Editor in Chief and other Cochrane governance committees, as well as supporting the Methods Groups and wider methods community in Cochrane. The Methods Executive is a conduit for communication and information flow between the Methods Group Convenors and the Editor in Chief, Editorial Board, Scientific Committee, Cochrane Council and Cochrane Central Executive.

## Accountability and reporting

- The Methods Executive will be accountable to the Methods Group Convenors and Editor in Chief.
- The Methods Executive will report to the Methods Group Convenors on activities, with a written report presented at the Methods Group Convenors meeting held at the annual Colloquium and incorporated into the final minutes.
- The Methods Executive will produce written reports or papers for the Editor in Chief and other Cochrane stakeholder groups as required.

## Roles and Responsibilities

- Provide leadership for the methods community and have general oversight on key methods-related activities within Cochrane.
- Seek to ensure Cochrane is kept informed of important new methods (and improvements to existing methods) that should be considered for use in Cochrane.
- Advise the Editor in Chief on all aspects relating to methodology and Methods Groups, as relevant to scientific content, in a timely and effective manner; including, but not limited, to methodological priorities for Cochrane, strategies to improve the methodological quality of Cochrane Reviews, methods implementation, methods development, methods training and methods funding.
- Provide a 'triage' filter for new or out-of-date methods or tool proposals to Cochrane and escalate proposals that meet pre-specified criteria to the Scientific Committee, where applicable.
- Facilitate effective and timely communications between members of the Methods Executive and with other Cochrane bodies or working groups.
- Consider any relevant decisions or discussions from the Editor in Chief and Editorial Board, Scientific Committee or Cochrane Council, to share these as appropriate with the Methods Group Convenors, and to delegate appropriate actions to individuals or Methods Groups.
- Oversee Methods Groups and ensure they are supported in their functions, including recruitment of Methods Groups Convenors, supporting effective functioning (e.g. negotiating core functions with Methods Groups, assessment of performance), and establishing non-viability of Methods Groups. Any decisions to establish new Methods Groups or dissolve current Methods Groups are to be made by the Editor in Chief following advice from the Methods Executive.

- Assist the filling of methods-related positions on any Cochrane sub- and advisory committees, or other special projects or working groups, and to ensure appropriate methods representation where none currently exists.
- Act as a voice for the methods community within Cochrane, such as for Methods Groups, liaising with Editor in Chief, Scientific Committee, Cochrane Council and Cochrane Central Executive Team to ensure any issues or concerns raised are addressed.
- Advocate for Cochrane methods to the wider methods community.

### **Decision-making**

- Make decisions on methods-related activities in Cochrane, as appropriate, including, but not limited to, the topic, organisation and delivery of the annual Methods Symposium and provision of a formal methods training event (where there is a specific budget allocation).
- For decisions taken by the Methods Executive, members of the Methods Executive (see 'Membership of the Methods Executive' below) will aim to reach full consensus. Where this is not possible, decisions will be taken based on a majority vote. In the case of a tied vote, the Chairs of the Methods Executive will have the deciding vote.
- For decisions to be taken at Methods Executive meetings, a quorum of more than half of the membership of the Methods Executive is necessary. For decisions to be taken by e-mail correspondence, it is expected that all members of the Methods Executive will vote but if this is not possible the above quorum stands.

### **Meetings and communications**

- One-to-two face-to-face meeting per year, the first of which is held at the mid-year Governance Meetings and the second at the annual Cochrane Colloquium, depending on available Methods Executive budget.
- Regular teleconferences (usually 90 minutes), approximately every six-to-eight weeks.
- E-mail discussion via [methods-exec@lists.cochrane.org](mailto:methods-exec@lists.cochrane.org).
- Specific tasks may be conducted by email and within smaller groups of members.

### **Membership of the Methods Executive**

- Membership will be on a voluntary basis.
- Volunteers will be expected to have the time to devote to the position, the skills required, and the trust of their colleagues.
- For the six elected Methods Groups Convenors positions, during open applications any Methods Group Convenor can nominate themselves to be a member of the Methods Executive. If multiple suitable Convenors step forward all Methods Groups will be asked to vote on the candidates (one vote per Group with candidates ranked in order of preference).
- For elected Methods Group Convenors, all terms will be for three years and each Methods Group Convenor will automatically rotate off at the end of their term. To ensure continuity, terms will be staggered to ensure that approximately one third of the Group is replaced in a given year. A two-term limit will be set on the number of terms that may be served (six years), but reappointment is contingent upon the other Methods Executive members' approval. If elections fail, members may be asked to serve another year.
- The Senior Methods Advisor and CDSR Methods Section Editor positions are appointed and relate to other associated positions that do not have tenure.

- The Cochrane Council positions are appointed and comprise of the methods-representatives elected to the Cochrane Council; their term on the Methods Executive is associated with their Council tenure.
- The Scientific Committee and Handbook Editor positions are deputising roles; therefore, if these are not filled by members in elected or appointed positions, the Methods Executive will seek representation through liaison with the Cochrane Central Executive Team.

### **Size, composition and representation**

- The Methods Executive is limited to eight people and should include the following representatives:
  - 6 elected Methods Groups Convenors (*elected roles*).
  - 1 Senior Methods Advisor (representing the Editorial Board) (*appointed role*)
  - 1 CDSR Methods Section Editor (*appointed role*)
  - 2 Cochrane Council representatives (*appointed roles*)
  - 1 Scientific Committee representative (*deputising role*)
  - 1 Handbook Editor representative (*deputising role*)
  - Ex Officio: Methods Implementation Co-ordinator, Senior Methods Editor, Methods Support Unit Lead, Head of People Services.
- Ideally, the Methods Executive members will reflect the diversity of methods activities in Cochrane, in particular their geographical distribution, type of activity (e.g. theoretical research vs empirical research vs development of guidance vs implementation) and type of methodology (e.g. intervention vs diagnostic test accuracy; statistical vs non-statistical; generic vs specific, core vs non-core methods).
- The Methods Executive is supported administratively by the Central Executive Team, specifically the Methods Implementation Coordinator and Methods Liaison Officer.

### **Selection and role of Co-Chairs**

- The Methods Executive will select two Co-Chairs from amongst its membership. Co-chairs are responsible for Methods Executive conduct. Co-Chairs will manage the agenda and briefing of members in consultation with the Methods Implementation Coordinator. The Co-Chairs are expected to have experience chairing similar bodies and should have strong communication and conflict resolution skills. The Co-Chairs may be required to represent the Methods Executive on certain occasions.
- The Co-Chairs hold office for two years, with annual elections so only one Co-Chair rotates off in one calendar year. Any Methods Executive member with two or more years remaining on the Methods Executive can nominate themselves to be Co-Chair. If multiple suitable candidates step forward, Methods Executive members will be asked to vote on the candidates (one vote per member with candidates ranked in order of preference). Co-Chairs may continue to hold office for a further two-year term with the approval of the Methods Executive members. After completing two terms, an individual may not stand again as a Co-Chair.

### **Appendix - Key functions**

#### Co-ordination

The Methods Executive is responsible for co-ordinating methods activities and communications between the Editor in Chief and Editorial Board, Scientific Committee, Cochrane Council, Handbook Editors, Methods Groups Convenors, and wider Cochrane methods community. It

provides a central point within Cochrane where knowledge on methodological development and activity is centralised and communicated.

#### Methods triage filter

The Methods Executive will provide a triage filter for methods proposals, including proposals to drop current methods, and escalate proposals that meet the following criteria to the Scientific Committee: First, methods with a wide-ranging impact on the conduct of Cochrane Reviews (e.g. built into the structure of the review or methods that became mandatory); second, widespread use or mass resources from Cochrane needed (e.g. training required); and third, controversial methodological topics without community consensus. For proposals that do not meet these criteria, the Methods Executive should liaise with the relevant Methods Groups, and Cochrane Central Executive Team, to determine the appropriate way forward. All proposals will be submitted via the [Cochrane Methods website](#).

#### Assist and advise

The Methods Executive will advise the Editor in Chief and Editorial Board and Scientific Committee on all aspects relating to methodology and Methods Groups, as relevant to scientific content, in a timely and effective manner; including, but not limited, to methodological priorities for Cochrane, strategies to improve the methodological quality of Cochrane Reviews (e.g. considering how to address poorly-implemented Handbook methods, or discouraging use of obsolete methods), methods implementation, methods development, methods training and methods funding. The Senior Methods Advisor, who is a member of the Methods Executive and Editorial Board, will be the main conduit for liaison and discussion on these topics. The Methods Executive will advise and feed back to the Cochrane Council on methods-related activities or concerns. For any queries relevant to a specific evidence synthesis method, the Methods Executive will broker the help and advice from relevant experts or specific Methods Groups. The Methods Executive will be the main source of support and an escalation point for the effective functioning of Methods Groups. The Methods Executive will act as a voice for the methods community within Cochrane, including for Methods Groups, liaising with Cochrane Central Executive Team, Editorial Board (through the Senior Methods Advisor) and Cochrane Council to ensure any issues or concerns raised are addressed

#### Methods voice within Cochrane

The Methods Executive will assist in filling any methods-related positions on any Cochrane sub- and advisory committees, or other special projects or working groups, and will ensure appropriate methods representation where none currently exists. Opportunities to be on these committees should be shared equally between members of the Methods Executive. The Methods Executive will provide an outward-facing function to promote and represent Cochrane methods within the wider methods community, if applicable.