Informing the politics of prioritizing systematic reviews

Background:
The Cochrane Collaboration has recently set its strategic objectives for 2020. Target 1.1 describes the Collaboration aim to develop *a list of approximately 200 new high-priority and 'to-update' Cochrane Systematic Reviews that will direct production priorities; and establish a decision-making framework to update it at regular intervals*[1]. Cochrane groups have attempted to engage with different group of stakeholders including policy makers [2-4].However, the methods used to engage with stakeholders and set priorities have less often included research in policy sciences, such as economics, history, operations research, political science, political sociology and public administration/management[5].

Objective:
This project will initiate a process of dialogue that engages with policy makers in five countries, USA, Canada, Italy, England and South Africa to inform priorities of the Cochrane Collaboration. This will be in partnership with the relevant Cochrane Centres in each country. It aims to

- yield knowledge about priorities for topics of systematic reviews by devising methods which Cochrane groups could engage and respond more precisely to the priorities of policy makers in a country and consequently increase the influence of scientific methods on the priorities of policy makers.
- devise criteria for choosing to conduct (or update) reviews for the allocation of scarce resources in the context of taking pains not to waste such resources by conducting SRs that are of lesser relevance for policymakers, clinicians and patients. The project will elicit policymakers' views on criteria for choosing to conduct reviews and re-reviews (for example, the relative importance to them of burden of disease data, cost data, and pressures from professional, commercial, and patient advocacy groups).

Methods:
The project will involve nine steps [5]:

1. Devise questions –some general, others country-specific –the teams would ask in conversations with persons who are important in making decisions about policy and practice
2. Discuss the categories of people with whom to discuss priority setting processes and priorities for systematic reviews (whether, for example, it would be important to talk with leaders of competing political parties and groups that have competing interests in particular countries)
3. Select several countries in which to pilot these discussions/conversations
4. Review reports from the teams in the piloting countries about their initial conversations and, as a result, revise the list of questions each team will ask
5. Discuss reports from each country-team about their conversations in order to separate generalizable and country-specific priorities for reviews
6. Discuss the results of conversations in each country about the list of reviews that appear to have cross-national priority
7. Discuss the results of conversations with each team's informants about processes for setting key questions for reviews that have country-specific priority as well as those from the cross-national list that have the most appeal
8. Draft an article for publication about the general and country-specific findings of the project

9. Discuss and incorporate comments on the draft article from members of the country-teams as well as from the persons in each country with whom they talked about priorities (having assured policy makers that the revised article will take account of their comments but not necessarily change the teams' conclusions)

1. The Cochrane Collaboration, *Cochrane Strategy to 2020: 2014 Targets (internal version). Available from http://www.cochrane.org/community/organisation-administration/cochrane-strategy-2020.* 16th January 2014.
2. Nasser, M., et al., *Ensuring relevance for Cochrane reviews: evaluating processes and methods for prioritizing topics for Cochrane reviews.* J Clin Epidemiol, 2013. **66**(5): p. 474-82.
3. Cumpston, M.S., et al., *Australian health policy makers' priorities for research synthesis: a survey.* Aust Health Rev, 2012. **36**(4): p. 401-11.
4. Doyle, J., et al., *Global priority setting for Cochrane systematic reviews of health promotion and public health research.* J Epidemiol Community Health, 2005. **59**(3): p. 193-7.
5. Fox, D. and M. Nasser, *Informing the politics of prioritizing (and funding) systematic reviews: another potential step for the Agenda and Priority Setting Methods Group.* Cochrane Methods, 2013(4th Supplement).