



Chief Operating Officer

JOB DETAILS	
Job Title:	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Reports to (title):	Chief Executive Officer
Date of this version:	July 2026
Version review due:	12 months after appointment, and thereafter in line with Cochrane's job-description review cycle.

PURPOSE OF THE JOB
The Chief Operating Officer will provide strategic and operational leadership to ensure that Cochrane is efficient, financially sustainable, well governed, and equipped to deliver its future strategy. The postholder will lead the development of a focused, integrated and future-ready operating model, ensuring that People and Culture, Finance, Governance and Risk, Project & Procurement Management, IT, Corporate Services, and operational support for grant management and fundraising work together effectively to support Cochrane's mission and long-term impact. The Chief Operating Officer will strengthen financial discipline, improve organisational effectiveness, simplify processes, support responsible technology and AI-enabled ways of working, and ensure robust governance, risk management and delivery oversight. The role will also maintain continuity and high performance across Cochrane's core business operations while enabling the organisation to adapt to a changing evidence, technology and funding landscape. As a trusted partner and formal deputy to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Chief Operating Officer will deputise for the CEO as required, representing the CEO internally and externally where appropriate, providing continuity of executive leadership, and making or escalating operational decisions within agreed delegated authority. This will enable the CEO to focus on external strategy, partnerships, funders, policy influence and Cochrane's wider role in the global evidence ecosystem.

PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTABILITIES/KEY RESULT AREAS

The Chief Operating Officer will provide strategic and operational leadership across Cochrane and will be accountable for:

Operational leadership

- Deputising for the CEO as required, including representing the CEO internally and externally, providing continuity of executive leadership, and exercising agreed delegated authority on operational matters.
- Translating Cochrane's strategy into clear operational plans, ensuring that priorities, resources, systems and structures are aligned to organizational goals.
- Designing and delivering a sustainable operating model that improves efficiency, strengthens accountability, supports prioritisation and enables Cochrane to deliver its strategy.
- Reducing duplication, streamlining workflows and ensuring resources are allocated according to strategic importance, expected impact, affordability and sustainability rather than historical structures or silos.
- Leading organisational change, including workforce alignment, process redesign, resource reallocation and new ways of working where required, balancing pace with transparency and care.

Financial leadership and sustainability

- Ensuring robust financial governance, with decisions grounded in financial analysis, modelling, forecasting, business case development, investment appraisal and cost-benefit assessment.
- Strengthening financial discipline across the organisation, including value-for-money approaches, transparent prioritisation, reduction of duplication and challenge to legacy or low-impact spend.
- Working with the CEO, finance team, the Executive Leadership Team and the Governing Board to ensure Cochrane has a financially sustainable operating model, clear budgetary accountability and a disciplined approach to investment and disinvestment.

People, culture and change

- Leading senior managers through organisational change with clarity, pace, transparency and care, ensuring implementation is aligned with Cochrane's values and legal obligations.
- Working closely with People and Culture leadership to ensure workforce planning, capability development, organisational design and change processes are managed fairly and consistently.
- Embedding an operational culture that is accountable, collaborative, inclusive, financially responsible, data-informed and able to adapt at speed to changes in the evidence and technology landscape, together with employment legislation and best practice.

Technology, systems, data and AI

- Ensuring Cochrane’s systems, data flows and technology infrastructure, including AI-enabled tools, are integrated, secure, user-centered, cost-effective, scalable and aligned to future operating models.
- Ensuring technology supports efficient core services, finance, people and organisational workflows, including interoperability with third-party platforms.
- Supporting responsible digital and AI-enabled transformation that improves productivity, resilience and organisational impact while maintaining appropriate governance and human oversight.

Governance, risk and compliance

- Supporting the CEO in ensuring effective governance, risk management, compliance, business planning, procurement and organisational transparency.
- Ensuring operational policies, controls, systems, reporting arrangements and delivery disciplines support good decision-making by the Executive Leadership Team and Governing Board.
- Providing regular assurance on delivery, financial performance, organisational risk, dependencies and implementation progress.

Project & Procurement Management

- Oversee the work of the Project & Procurement Management Office, including grant, project and contract management, together with a transparent and responsible procurement process.
- In conjunction with ELT and SMT, ensure best practice is embedded across the organization and management information relating to projects, procurement, grants and contracts is formally recorded and communicated expediently and as per the agreed cycle of governance meetings.

Executive and organisational leadership

- The Chief Operating Officer will have leadership responsibility for Cochrane’s core operational functions, ensuring effective operational support for grant management and fundraising, processes, systems, reporting, financial oversight and delivery coordination.
- Contribute as a member of the Executive Leadership Team to organisational strategy, culture, governance, transformation, risk management, and prioritisation.
- Manage agreed budgets, resources, and delivery plans, with clear measures of progress, impact, and accountability.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential experience and expertise

- Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (FCMA) or similar qualification
- Substantial experience in a senior executive or operational leadership role within a complex, mission-driven organisation.
- Strong financial acumen, with direct experience of organisational budgeting, financial planning, forecasting, investment appraisal and managing multi-million-pound budgets.
- Thorough knowledge of UK charity SORP and governance requirements.
- A proven record of leading organisational transformation, including operating model design, prioritisation, cost optimisation, process improvement and change management.
- Experience of collaborating with senior leaders and Boards to translate strategy into delivery, strengthen accountability and support evidence-informed decision-making.
- Strong people leadership skills, with the ability to lead through ambiguity, organisational resistance and competing priorities while maintaining trust and transparency.
- Experience overseeing or working closely with finance, people and culture, technology, governance, legal, contracting and organisational change processes.
- Strong understanding of digital transformation, data, systems integration and the responsible use of AI to improve organisational effectiveness.
- Outstanding communication and influencing skills, with the confidence to challenge assumptions, negotiate outcomes and secure alignment across diverse stakeholders.
- A resilient and credible senior leader who can sustain momentum, make sound decisions in complex environments and deliver visible progress
- Influential relationship builder to develop confidence, trust and organisational capability, securing commitment to new ways of working across diverse teams and stakeholder groups.
- Commitment to Cochrane's mission, values, independence, equity and global collaboration.

Desirable

- A recognised professional qualification in one or more relevant disciplines across finance, operations, project management or organisational leadership
- Experience working in global research, health, evidence synthesis, grant-funded, policy or mission-driven environments.
- Experience working in a charity, non-profit, membership, learned society or mission-driven international organisation.

- Experience of digital, data, technology or AI-enabled transformation within operational, corporate services, grant management or knowledge-production workflows.
- Understanding of non-profit governance, Board reporting, risk management and complex stakeholder environments.
- Experience of project and constructive obligation accounting practices.

Skills and personal attributes

- Strong strategic judgement and operational pragmatism, with the ability to set priorities, allocate resources, make difficult trade-offs, and translate strategy into sustained delivery.
- Exceptional communication, facilitation, and influencing skills, with the ability to listen to diverse perspectives, build alignment, navigate challenge, and communicate complex issues clearly.
- Exceptional stakeholder engagement and relationship-building skills across cultures, disciplines, and seniority levels.
- A collaborative, empathetic, enabling, and values-driven leadership style that fosters trust, shared ownership, and meaningful community participation.
- Resilience, sound judgement, and diplomacy under pressure, with the ability to operate effectively through ambiguity, disagreement, and organisational change.

KEY INTERFACES

Internal: Chief Executive Officer; Executive Leadership Team; Senior Management Team; Cochrane Governing Board; People and Culture; finance; governance and risk; Project & Procurement Management Office; IT; corporate services; development, fundraising and grant management teams.

External: Suppliers, technology partners, funders, professional advisers, auditors, legal and employment advisers and other strategic stakeholders as required.

DIMENSIONS

Budgetary responsibility: accountable, through the CEO and in partnership with finance leadership, for Cochrane's overall operational budget, financial controls, resource allocation and value-for-money approach.

Number of direct and indirect reports: the Chief Operating Officer will lead a portfolio of operational functions. Direct reports are expected to include senior leaders responsible for People and Culture, finance, governance and risk, the Project & Procurement Management Office, and IT. The role will also provide operational oversight and coordination support for grant management and fundraising. Final reporting lines will be confirmed as part of the agreed leadership and operating model.