# Volunteering Strategy 2025-2028

Volunteers have always been integral to the Cochrane Collaboration, and they continue to contribute to our work at many levels. Cochrane's complex structure can be difficult to navigate and volunteers can feel forgotten about when a lot of focus is on evidence production, authors and groups. As we move into a new organisational structure, we want to harness the power of volunteers to support our mission. This Strategy aims to:

- define how volunteers are involved with Cochrane, and
- identify how we can improve our offer to volunteers, so they can continue to participate in our mission to deliver better, more equitable health for all.

We can categorise Cochrane volunteers into three distinct sections:
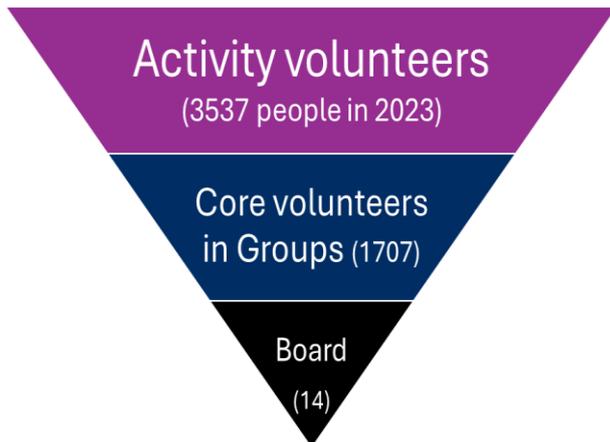
1. Activity volunteers - people doing discreet pieces of activity that support our work, like Cochrane Crowd, translation projects, peer reviewers and people recruited for tasks via Cochrane Engage (3858 volunteers in 2024) [1]

2. Core members of Cochrane Groups (1449 in 2024) – often these people are employed by a host institution, so not all of these people regard themselves as volunteers

3. Governance volunteers – our charity trustees

NB for the purposes of this strategy we are not defining authors as volunteers.

Some of Cochrane's strategic goals for 2025-2028 relate to volunteering:

- increase the number of volunteers who participate in our work, especially those in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries

- increase the length of time that volunteers stay with us

To help us plan how to achieve these goals, we carried out a survey and held some focus groups. Over 1900 people responded, both volunteers and those who are not volunteers, giving us valuable data on how people feel about volunteering with Cochrane.

The feedback was extremely positive but there were suggestions for changes that should improve volunteers' experiences, and therefore increase recruitment and retention.

Over the next three years we will:

Ensure Cochrane's volunteers feel that their needs are being met. To recruit and retain people with the right skills and enthusiasm we need to ensure our volunteers feel their contribution is worthwhile and appreciated. To be a sustainable and inclusive organisation there needs to be a clear pathway of progression.

Communicate effectively with volunteers and potential volunteers. Our Groups don't always have enough volunteers with the right skills. We will improve our communication about what opportunities are available to increase recruitment.

Encourage Cochrane Groups to create more volunteering opportunities. Cochrane appreciates that having the time to volunteer is a privilege, and we will work with Groups to help them to promote interesting opportunities for people to get involved as volunteers, with a focus on increasing engagement in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries. We will provide more resources to Cochrane Groups to help them to recruit and retain more volunteers.

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[1] There are too many other types of volunteer activities to list here.

Over the next three years our action plan will focus on three main areas:

Meet volunteers' needs.
Cochrane can recruit volunteers by providing resources and benefits that meet their needs. Our existing volunteers told us why they give their time to Cochrane, and we can encourage them to keep volunteering by helping them attain those ambitions:

Why people volunteer	What we will do to meet these needs	Timescale
Make an impact in global healthcare	• Showcase the impact of volunteering	Long
Learn new skills	• Provide a learning profile for our volunteers • Investigate feasibility of expanding the mentoring programme	Medium Medium
Be a part of the Cochrane Community	• Improve communication • Make it easier to join networks	Already started Medium
Career progression	• Provide a shareable record of contributions to Cochrane's work • Showcase progression pathways within Cochrane ecosystem	Long Medium

Improve communication.
Cochrane can recruit volunteers, and support Cochrane Groups to recruit volunteers, by communicating more effectively about the opportunities available:

What do people want to know	What we will do	Timescale
What opportunities are available	• Create and implement a communications plan • Encourage different areas of Cochrane to create and publicise volunteer opportunities • Targeted communication to supporters in LMICs	Short / Medium Short Short
What is the impact of volunteering	• Promote case studies highlighting individual volunteers' stories	Medium
What are the benefits of volunteering	• Improve messaging around volunteering and membership	Short

Support Cochrane Groups.
Cochrane can support groups to manage their volunteers successfully:

What do groups need	What we will do	Timescale
Easy way to promote volunteering	• Create and share template promotional materials that can be used and translated by groups • Support groups to identify volunteering opportunities that can be fulfilled	Short Medium
Guidance on using Cochrane Engage	• Improve help pages • Hold regular drop-in sessions for group staff for "how-to" and gathering feedback • Make improvements to Engage functionality	Short Short Medium
Support for managing volunteers	• Improve good practice guidance • Create and share templates	Short Medium

The development of this strategy has been led by the Membership team in the Publishing and Technology Directorate of the Central Executive Team (CET) in Cochrane. It has been supported by a steering group of volunteers from other parts of the CET, volunteer managers and volunteers at board level.