

Testing ways to improve support for Cochrane authors

CASE STORY

What we did



Purpose: We wanted to know whether providing fellowships to authors helped people complete or update Cochrane systematic reviews.



Target audience: Cochrane authors in Africa speaking various African languages and English.

Year: 2013-14.



What we did: We surveyed 64 relevant authors. We did this by :

- searching Archie and identifying authors eligible to participate
- inviting authors to take part in an anonymous online survey
- disseminating the survey via email with two email reminders
- obtaining informed consent electronically
- analyzing quantitative data using Excel and categorizing the themes from open-end responses

Survey respondents were mainly from South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon and Kenya (the countries highlighted in orange on the map)





What we achieved

Surveyed
authors with
stalled
reviews



Developed
five-day
fellowship
support



Reviews
progressed
and authors
felt supported

- The **survey** found that lack of dedicated time and financial resources got in the way of completing Cochrane reviews.
- As a result we **developed a new strategy**: offering authors a five-day fellowship to come to Cochrane South Africa and spend dedicated time on their reviews. The fellowships were funded by the Effective Health Care Research Consortium (www.evidence4health.org).
- In 2014, we had three fellowship intakes with a total of 16 lead authors and 7 co-authors, working across 11 Cochrane Review Groups. Within about one year of attending the fellowship **44% of participating lead authors submitted their review** for peer review.
- Elements of the fellowship that participants said were **helpful** were ringfenced paid time to spend on reviews, daily technical and methodological support sessions and the ability to work in author teams and liaise with Cochrane Review Groups to solve immediate issues.

What we learnt

- **Evaluation helped us plan practical solutions** to address the barriers to completing Cochrane reviews.
- **Providing short fellowships** for Cochrane authors was effective as two fifths of reviews progressed towards completions within a year. We found that further active support was needed after the fellowship, as authors continued to have many demands on their time.
- When planning evaluation, **start with what you want to achieve**. Consider what activity or decision you want to implement then focus on what type of data will be needed to inform your decision.
- Think about the **time points** when it will be useful to collect data such as before the initiative, afterwards or both.

Find out more

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