

Volunteerism and the Citizen Translator: A Case Study of Cochrane

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Volunteers are important participants in crisis translation activities, and some crisis translation efforts depend on volunteerism (see, e.g., Folaron 2010). The ethics of using volunteer translation, methods for volunteer translator collaboration, and typical profiles and motivations of volunteer translators have been examined (see, e.g., Jiménez Crespo 2016), yet research into the training and support of volunteer translators remains underdeveloped. Nevertheless, an understanding of training and support is vital to building robust and sustainable communities of volunteers producing quality translations and is, therefore, of great relevance to crisis translation.

This paper presents a case study of volunteerism at Cochrane, a global network of researchers, health professionals, patients, and others interested in using evidence to inform health-related decisions. Harnessing the enthusiasm and efforts of interested individuals is central to Cochrane's work. The paper will introduce the organisation, focusing on the ways in which it recruits, retains, trains, and supports its volunteers. The data on which the paper is based were gathered during a period of fieldwork by the researchers at Cochrane Germany Foundation's office in Freiburg, Germany in July and August 2018. Interviews with six key members of the global organisation – translation project managers from various Cochrane offices around the world – as well as analysis of relevant grey literature and embedded observation from the field make up the data sets.

Findings centre on the challenges and tensions involved in training and supporting volunteer translators in a way that ensures quality translation outputs. The paper discusses ways in which Cochrane currently resolves these tensions, and suggests ways of dealing with these challenges in the future, including greater recognition of the project manager role in harnessing volunteer efforts, further implementation of collaborative and translation technologies, and greater leverage of existing professional expertise within the volunteer network.

Keywords: crisis translation; volunteer; training and support; Cochrane; case study

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