INPLASY guidance for protocol registration and platform use

Edition 2026 • Updated 16 September 2026

This guide helps authors prepare, register, cite and maintain protocols on the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Protocols. It covers systematic reviews, scoping reviews and the dedicated route for methodological studies. Register early, describe the methods clearly and keep an accurate record of subsequent changes.

1 Purpose and scope

INPLASY provides a public record of a project's planned methods and its development over time. Registration helps readers locate ongoing work, assess overlap between projects and compare the completed study with its protocol. It does not, by itself, prevent duplication or establish the quality of the methods. Searching for related work remains the authors' responsibility.

INPLASY was launched in March 2020. Its homepage displayed more than 9,700 registered protocols and representation from 100 countries when consulted on 16 September 2026. These are dated platform figures, not a count of countries visiting the website. [1]

Use this guide alongside the reporting and methodological guidance appropriate to the study. PRISMA-P remains the relevant PRISMA guidance for systematic review protocols; PRISMA 2020 addresses completed systematic reviews. For scoping reviews, use the current JBI Manual for methods and PRISMA-ScR for reporting the completed review. PRISMA-S supports transparent reporting of searches. [10–14]

2 Main platform functions

Function	What authors can do
Public registration	Make the protocol accessible through a public record.
INPLASY identifier and DOI	Identify and cite the registered protocol using its assigned identifiers.
Search and browsing	Locate related protocols through Browse and the site search tools.
Separate submission routes	Use the route for systematic reviews, scoping reviews or methodological studies.
Protocol amendments	Submit a revised protocol while retaining the earlier public version.
Free status updates	Report discontinuation, completion or publication through the status form.
Publication links	Supply the URL or DOI of the completed review.
ORCID connection	Connect the protocol to author profiles through the supported Crossref workflow.
Prepared file submission	Download an INPLASY template, complete it and upload it through Fast Forms.
Membership	Access the registration and amendment benefits included in the selected plan.

A DOI and a registry identifier support identification and citation; they are not certifications of methodological quality. [1–9]

ORCID permissions. Supply the correct ORCID iD for each author who wishes to use this feature. Auto-update depends on the relevant metadata and the author's authorization for Crossref to update the ORCID record. Entering an ORCID iD alone does not guarantee an update. Check the profile after publication; the protocol can also be added using its DOI. [15,16]

3 Choose the appropriate submission route

Systematic reviews. Use the systematic review route for eligible evidence syntheses, including intervention, diagnostic, prognostic, epidemiological and preclinical reviews. The platform also accommodates other synthesis designs, such as rapid reviews, umbrella reviews and mapping reviews. Describe the actual design and any planned meta-analysis in the title and methods. If the fit is uncertain, ask the editorial office which form to use. [1,16]

Scoping reviews. Use the dedicated scoping review route. Define the population or participants, concept and context, together with the purpose of mapping the evidence. Explain selection, data charting and presentation methods. Do not add an intervention, comparator or meta-analysis solely to fit a systematic review format. [4,13,14]

Methodological studies. Use the dedicated form for meta-research, meta-epidemiology, research on research and similar methodological projects. Its instructions specifically exclude systematic and scoping review submissions. Specify the research units, sampling frame, outcome definitions and analysis plan. [5]

Prepared files. The edited-files page offers separate systematic review and scoping review templates. Complete the appropriate INPLASY template and submit it through the file-upload route. The upload form still requires administrative information and declarations. [7]

4 When to register and how to report timing

Prepare and register the protocol as early as possible, preferably before formal study screening and data extraction. Record the actual stage reached on the submission date. Preliminary exploratory searches should be distinguished from formal selection of eligible studies.

If work has already advanced, describe which activities have occurred, the relevant dates and why registration was delayed. State whether study findings were available when methodological decisions were made. A later registration cannot establish that earlier decisions were prespecified. [17]

Select the option that accurately reflects progress. Where the form offers "Completed but not published", use that option when applicable. Use "Other" only when the available choices do not describe the project adequately, and provide an explanation. Report the retrospective timing clearly in the protocol and the final article.

INPLASY permits retrospective registration, but this does not guarantee acceptance by a journal. For a new registration involving a review that is already published, ask the editorial office about eligibility before submitting: the current terms describe retrospective registration for completed but unpublished reviews. [8]

Suggested disclosure structure. State the registration date; the dates of screening, extraction and analysis already performed; the reason for delayed registration; and which methodological decisions, if any, were made after findings were known. Keep contemporaneous records that support this account.

5 Prepare and submit the protocol

1. Search INPLASY and other relevant registries and bibliographic sources for related completed and ongoing work. Explain why the proposed project is needed, including how it differs from an existing review when relevant. [18]

2. Agree the question, methods, author list, affiliations, contributions, funding and competing interests with the review team.
3. Register or sign in to the INPLASY account as required by the selected submission route, and choose the appropriate form or template.
4. Complete the required fields in English. Search strategies may retain the language needed for the databases being searched. Use “Not applicable” with a brief explanation only when a field genuinely does not apply.
5. Check names, author order, ORCID iDs, email addresses, dates, methods and uploaded files before submitting. Keep a local copy of the submitted material and payment confirmation.
6. Complete the applicable payment or membership process. After publication, check the record and save the INPLASY number, DOI and record URL.

Saved drafts. Where a form displays “Save and Submit Later”, keep the resume link private and retain a local copy. The methodological-studies form currently states that the link expires after 30 days. A saved, unsubmitted draft is not a registered protocol. [5]

Editorial checking. INPLASY checks submissions for registration eligibility. Records are not externally peer reviewed or assessed for methodological quality. The homepage describes a registration target of under 48 hours; treat this as a processing target rather than an unconditional guarantee. [1,2]

6 Guidance for the 33 systematic review fields

The numbering below follows the systematic review field structure in the INPLASY guidance. The scoping review and methodological-study forms have different structures. Follow the labels and required-field indicators in the form being completed. These recommendations describe useful content; they do not turn every recommendation into an additional mandatory platform field.

Item 1 Protocol title

Identify the document as a protocol and state the review design. Include the principal topic and population or research context, and identify an update of an earlier review when relevant. Mention meta-analysis or network meta-analysis when it is planned, while acknowledging in the methods that synthesis depends on the available evidence. Use sentence case and avoid claims about results before the review is conducted.

Item 2 Corresponding author

Provide the author’s full name, an actively monitored email address and institutional affiliation. Add the correct ORCID iD where available. This person coordinates communication about the record and its updates. Confirm that all listed authors have reviewed the submission and that their names, affiliations and contact details are accurate.

Item 3 Support

Identify financial and nonfinancial support, including grants, institutional support, supplied software or services, and relevant award numbers. If there is no specific funding, state this. Describe the sponsor’s role, or absence of a role, in designing, conducting, interpreting and disseminating the study. Funding information does not replace the separate competing-interests declaration.

Item 4 Review stage at submission

Choose the actual stage reached when submitting, such as preliminary searches, formal screening, data extraction, risk-of-bias assessment, analysis or completion without publication. Add dates and explanatory details when necessary. Disclose delayed registration and which activities or decisions preceded it. This field records timing at submission; Item 33 describes the project's current overall status.

Item 5 Organisational affiliation

Identify the institution or organisation responsible for the work, with department where relevant, city and country. Use the official institutional name. Provide additional affiliations in the relevant author fields or other-information section when the form permits. Do not substitute a postal address for an affiliation or assume that every author has the same institution.

Item 6 Conflicts of interest

Declare relevant financial and nonfinancial interests for the authors, including relationships with products, organisations or studies being evaluated. Explain how potential conflicts will be managed, such as assigning assessment of an author's own study to other reviewers. If no relevant conflicts exist, state this explicitly. A funding declaration alone is insufficient.

Item 7 Phone number

If providing this optional contact detail, include the international country and area codes. Supply only an appropriate professional contact number. Check the form's privacy information before entering personal contact details; do not assume that information submitted to a registration service is necessarily confidential.

Item 8 Review question or objective

State a focused, answerable objective. Use a framework suited to the design: PICO for many intervention questions, an exposure-based formulation where appropriate, or population, concept and context for scoping reviews. Specify the primary question and any secondary questions. Assess feasibility without changing the question merely to secure a favourable result or a larger pool of studies.

Item 9 Rationale

Explain the evidence gap and the contribution expected from the review. Identify relevant completed or ongoing reviews and explain any justified overlap, update or methodological difference. A small or empty evidence base can itself be informative; avoid altering the scope solely to prevent an empty review. Cite the key sources supporting the rationale.

Item 10 Condition or topic being studied

Describe the condition, phenomenon, methodological problem or subject area. Include definitions needed to interpret the eligibility criteria. The description may concern health, sport, education or another eligible topic; a disease label is not necessary for every design. Define specialised terminology and distinguish the topic from the specific review objective.

Item 11 Search strategy

Provide reproducible planned search strings, ideally for every database and at least a complete draft for one principal database. Identify the database and interface separately, such as MEDLINE via PubMed. Report controlled vocabulary, free-text terms, operators, limits and planned search dates or coverage. Describe updating, supplementary searching and search peer review where planned. Retain the executed strategies and dates for the final report. [12]

Item 12 Participants or population

Specify the population, setting and relevant characteristics, including how mixed populations will be handled. Define eligible subgroups and justify restrictions. In reviews where the units are studies, documents, institutions or other research objects, describe those units explicitly. Use criteria precise enough for different reviewers to apply consistently.

Item 13 Intervention or exposure

Describe the intervention, exposure, index test, prognostic factor or other focal element as appropriate. Include eligible variants, timing, intensity and relevant co-interventions. If the review does not evaluate an intervention, explain the relevant concept rather than forcing an intervention framework. State “Not applicable” with a reason where appropriate.

Item 14 Comparator

Define the eligible comparator or reference condition and any acceptable variations. For diagnostic reviews, describe the reference standard where relevant. For network meta-analysis, explain how treatments will be grouped into nodes. When the review question has no comparator, state this and explain why.

Item 15 Study designs to be included

Name the eligible study designs and relate their inclusion to the question. Randomized trials are often appropriate for intervention effects, while observational and other designs may address different questions. Do not use a universal evidence hierarchy to exclude designs needed for the objective. State how different designs will be analysed or kept separate.

Item 16 Eligibility criteria

Combine the question framework, designs, setting, dates, language and publication-status criteria into an operational definition. Justify restrictions. Explain how multiple reports of one study, overlapping samples and uncertain eligibility will be handled. Prespecify decisions and document later changes with their timing and rationale; do not silently alter criteria after examining study findings.

Item 17 Information sources

List the databases, registries, websites, repositories and other sources to be searched. Include citation searching, reference-list checks, grey literature and contact with investigators when planned. State coverage and planned update searches. Choose sources appropriate to the subject rather than reproducing a standard list that omits specialist literature. [12]

Item 18 Main outcomes

Define each primary outcome or principal variable, its measurement, eligible time points and any hierarchy for selecting among instruments or analyses. For intervention reviews, consider benefits and harms. Justify surrogate outcomes and acknowledge their limitations. For scoping or methodological projects, define the main concepts, characteristics or indicators to be charted or evaluated instead of imposing clinical outcomes.

Item 19 Additional outcomes

Prespecify secondary outcomes or additional variables and explain their relevance. Define measurement and time points where applicable. Clarify how multiple outcomes or analyses will be prioritised and reported. Secondary outcomes should not be restricted to those that support a preferred interpretation of the primary findings.

Item 20 Data management and review processes

Describe deduplication, screening, data extraction or charting, piloting and disagreement resolution. State the number of reviewers at each stage and whether decisions are independent or checked. Plan how multiple reports will be linked to one study, missing information sought, and full-text exclusions recorded. Identify software and versions, data storage and planned sharing. If automation or AI is used, describe its role and human verification as set out in Section 7.

Item 21 Risk of bias and certainty of evidence

Distinguish assessment of bias in individual study results from assessment of certainty across a body of evidence. Select design-appropriate tools, name their versions and describe assessors, independence and disagreement resolution. Explain how judgments will affect the synthesis. Where appropriate, specify a certainty framework such as GRADE by outcome. GRADE does not replace study-level risk-of-bias assessment, and it is not a universal requirement for every scoping or methodological study. [13,14]

Item 22 Strategy for data synthesis

Explain when studies will be combined, the planned effect measures and statistical model, and how differences between studies will be assessed. Prespecify handling of missing data, dependent estimates, multi-arm studies and conversions when relevant. Do not choose the model solely from a heterogeneity significance test. Describe the synthesis when meta-analysis is inappropriate. For network meta-analysis, address transitivity, inconsistency and the interpretation of rankings. For qualitative or scoping work, specify coding, charting and synthesis methods. [13]

Item 23 Subgroup analysis

Prespecify a limited set of plausible effect modifiers, the rationale for each and the planned comparison method. Where relevant, describe interaction tests and any meta-regression. Consider whether sufficient data are likely to be available. Label analyses introduced after the protocol as exploratory and avoid interpreting a difference between significant and nonsignificant subgroup results as proof of an interaction.

Item 24 Sensitivity analysis

Describe analyses that will test the effect of key decisions or assumptions, such as excluding studies at high risk of bias, using alternative models or changing assumptions about missing data. Distinguish these robustness checks from subgroup analyses. Identify which analyses were prespecified and explain any additional checks performed during the review.

Item 25 Language

State whether searches and study inclusion will have language restrictions and justify any restrictions. Describe translation arrangements where relevant. The language of an eligible study is separate from the platform's requirement to submit the protocol in English. Retain original-language search expressions when needed to make database searches reproducible.

Item 26 Countries involved

List the countries in which the review team is conducting the project. These describe the research team, not necessarily the countries of the studies to be included. Put geographical restrictions on eligible evidence in the eligibility criteria instead. Keep this information consistent with the authors' affiliations.

Item 27 Other relevant information

Use this field for details that do not fit elsewhere, such as related registrations, links to supplementary methods, repositories, important dates or explanations of delayed registration. Include references in a consistent citation style. Identify related or earlier protocols and explain their relationship. Provide links to accessible supporting material without exposing confidential information.

Item 28 Keywords

Choose terms that describe the topic, population or context, study design and principal methods. The existing INPLASY guidance recommends four to eight keywords or phrases separated by semicolons. Use terms that readers are likely to search and avoid irrelevant terms added only to increase visibility.

Item 29 Dissemination plans

Describe how findings will be shared, such as through a journal article, preprint, conference, repository or accessible summary. Include plans to share data, extraction forms and analysis code where appropriate. Explain how the final publication will be linked to the registered protocol and how protocol deviations will be reported.

Item 30 Authors and contributions

Enter each author's full name, email where requested, ORCID iD where available and contribution. Use consistent spelling and confirm authorship and contribution statements with the team. Contributions can be described using clear roles, including design, searching, screening, extraction, analysis and writing. Declare relevant use of AI as a tool; responsibility for the content remains with the human authors.

Item 31 Author order and citation names

List all authors in the agreed order and follow the form's surname-and-initials instructions. Check compound surnames, particles, accents and culturally appropriate name structure with the individual authors. Do not infer name components from nationality. Ensure that the abbreviated list corresponds exactly to the full names provided in Item 30.

Item 32 Billing and correspondence email

Provide the email address requested for invoices and payment confirmation. Keep it accurate and monitor it after submission. Distinguish billing communication from the corresponding-author contact published with the record. Keep the submission receipt and check spam or junk folders if an expected message is missing.

Item 33 Current review status

Choose the status that accurately describes the project. After registration, report when it is discontinued, completed without publication, or completed and published using the free status-update form. Supply the review or preprint URL when available and clearly identify a preprint as such. A change of status does not replace an amendment describing substantive changes to the protocol. [6]

7 Additional methodological recommendations

These recommendations improve transparency where applicable; they describe the authors' study methods rather than additional software functions provided by INPLASY.

Automation and AI. If a tool influences searching, screening, extraction, appraisal or synthesis, specify its name and version, tasks, important settings, validation approach and human checks. Record how errors and disagreements will be resolved. Describe substantial changes to this workflow as protocol amendments. Language editing alone should be distinguished from using AI to make research decisions.

Missing results and reporting bias. Explain how unpublished studies, missing outcomes and selective reporting will be considered. Specify planned assessment methods and the conditions under which they are informative. Distinguish these concerns from missing participant data within an individual study.

Design-specific methods. For scoping reviews, define the charting framework and explain whether critical appraisal will be conducted and why. For methodological studies, define the sampling frame, units of analysis, measured constructs and handling of clustering or repeated observations. For living reviews, specify update triggers, search frequency and responsibility for maintaining the record. [13,14,19]

8 Amendments and version history

Use the protocol-update route when changing the question, eligibility criteria, outcomes, searches, analytical methods or other protocol content. The published update creates a new version while preserving the original. Earlier versions remain available for readers to assess the sequence of changes. [9,16]

For a useful amendment record, provide the INPLASY identifier, affected section, previous wording or decision, revised wording, reason for the change, date of the decision and review stage at that time. State whether relevant study findings were already known. Describe foreseeable implications for the analysis and interpretation.

Submit amendments promptly and, where possible, before implementing the revised methods. Keep a dated change log and report important deviations in the completed article even if they have already been registered. Do not create a separate new registration merely to replace the history of the same project; ask the editorial office about records representing a distinct new project.

Corrections and authorship changes. Contact the editorial office with the identifier, the requested correction and the supporting explanation. Confirm any authorship change with the affected team members. Use the official correction or amendment process rather than assuming that submitting a form allows direct editing of a published record.

9 Status updates and publication links

The status-update form offers three choices: discontinued, completed but not published, and completed and published. It requests an author name, email, INPLASY number and relevant publication link or explanation. This service is free. [6]

Use “Completed and published” for a published review, and provide its DOI or stable URL. If supplying a preprint, identify it explicitly in the message and provide the later journal article when available. Reporting discontinuation helps other researchers interpret an inactive record; include the reason when appropriate.

Authors remain responsible for keeping their records current. Check the public page after an update and contact the editorial office if the status or linked article needs correction.

10 Fees and membership

Consult the current submission page, Fees and Services, and the membership offer before payment. The following per-submission amounts were displayed on the Fees and Services page on 16 September 2026. [2,3]

Service	Published charge in USD
New protocol registration	29.99
Protocol amendment	14.99
Review status update	Free
Annual or permanent membership	Consult the current plan and checkout

Annual and permanent membership options are advertised with unlimited registrations and amendments within the applicable plan conditions. The permanent plan also advertises access to protocol data arranged in structured spreadsheets. Review the scope of the subscription, permitted users, authorship conditions, renewal arrangements and activation instructions before subscribing. [3]

Check the final amount and applicable conditions at checkout. If displayed prices or plan terms differ across pages, obtain clarification from the editorial office before paying. Do not infer that an amendment fee applies to a status-only update, or that “registration without charge” means a paid membership itself is free.

11 How to cite and share a registered protocol

In the completed article, report the registry name, INPLASY registration number and registration date. Include the DOI or stable record URL, and explain retrospective registration and amendments where relevant. A protocol record and the final review are separate research outputs and should be cited accordingly.

Use the bibliographic details displayed on the record. A practical citation structure is: Author surname and initials. Protocol title. INPLASY. Year. INPLASY registration number. DOI. If referring to a particular revision, identify its version or date as displayed. Adapt punctuation to the target journal’s reference style.

Share the DOI or public record link rather than only an isolated PDF. This helps readers locate the current record and its available history. Include links to associated datasets, code or supplementary methods when they are available and appropriate for public sharing.

12 Final check before submission

1. The selected form matches the study design.
2. The title identifies the protocol and the correct type of review or study.
3. Related completed and ongoing work has been checked and the rationale is clear.
4. The actual review stage, dates and any delayed registration are disclosed.
5. Eligibility, search methods, outcomes or variables, review processes and synthesis methods are reproducible.
6. Risk-of-bias and certainty methods are appropriate to the design and are distinguished from one another.
7. All authors, affiliations, order, contributions, funding and competing interests have been checked.
8. Required fields, English-language text and any uploaded INPLASY template are complete.
9. Fees or membership conditions have been checked and a local copy has been retained.
10. A team member is responsible for amendments, status updates and the final publication link.

For submission questions or record corrections, contact editorialmanager@inplasy.com, quoting the INPLASY identifier when one has been assigned.

13 Platform links and references

Platform pages and online methodological resources were consulted on 16 September 2026. Use the current online version when preparing a new submission.

1. INPLASY. Homepage and platform overview.
2. INPLASY. Fees and Services.
3. INPLASY. Membership options.
4. INPLASY. Scoping review submission.
5. INPLASY. Methodological study submission.
6. INPLASY. Free review status update.
7. INPLASY. Edited protocol templates and Fast Forms upload.
8. INPLASY. Terms and Conditions.
9. INPLASY. Update a protocol and systematic review submission.
10. Moher D, et al. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols PRISMA-P 2015 statement. Systematic Reviews. 2015;4:1. doi:10.1186/2046-4053-4-1. See the PRISMA-P resources.
11. Page MJ, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ. 2021;372:n71. doi:10.1136/bmj.n71.
12. Rethlefsen ML, et al. PRISMA-S an extension to the PRISMA Statement for Reporting Literature Searches in Systematic Reviews. Systematic Reviews. 2021;10:39. doi:10.1186/s13643-020-01542-z.
13. Higgins JPT, Thomas J, Chandler J, et al., editors. Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions. Version 6.5. Cochrane; 2024.
14. Aromataris E, Lockwood C, Porritt K, Pilla B, Jordan Z, editors. JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis. JBI; 2024, with online updates. See also Tricco AC, et al. PRISMA extension for scoping reviews PRISMA-ScR checklist and explanation. Annals of Internal Medicine. 2018;169:467–473. doi:10.7326/M18-0850.
15. Crossref. Auto-Update Has Arrived ORCID Records Move to the Next Level. Explains metadata and author-permission requirements.
16. Canellas JVDS, et al. The international platform of registered systematic review and meta-analysis protocols INPLASY at 3 years an analysis of 4,658 registered protocols on inplasy.com, platform features, and website statistics. Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics. 2023;8:1135853. doi:10.3389/frma.2023.1135853.
17. Canellas J, Borges F. How should retrospectively registered protocols be interpreted in systematic reviews? Systematic Reviews. 2026;15:210. doi:10.1186/s13643-026-03278-8. Commentary on transparent interpretation of retrospective registration.
18. Ferreira RT, et al. What evidence syntheses reveal about PROSPERO, INPLASY, OSF, the Research Registry, and protocols.io a meta-research study. Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics. 2026;11:1738112. doi:10.3389/frma.2026.1738112.
19. Borges FCP, Ferreira RT, Duarte KHA, et al. Contemporary practices in scoping review protocol registration a meta-research analysis of high-impact health journals 2024–2025. BMC Medical Research Methodology. 2026;26:194. doi:10.1186/s12874-026-02919-9.