



## POLICY BRIEF 2023:20

Perspectives into topical issues in society and ways to support political decision making.

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# An operative model for implementing missions

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The government must be able to find novel solutions to the greatest challenges of our time, such as the climate crisis, new security threats, an ageing population, and technological transformations.

Directional mission-driven research and innovation policy provides an approach for the government to implement its strategic objectives by solving complex challenges together with actors in different sectors.

In this policy brief, we briefly present an operative model that is based on a comprehensive literature review and an empirical analysis of the Finnish context. Further, we propose routes for implementing the model in Finland.

## What is mission-driven innovation policy?

In Finland, and more broadly in Europe, there are many developments taking place within the field of innovation policy. For example, in Finland, the parliamentary working group on research, development, and innovation activities recently proposed increasing national R&D investments to 4% of gross domestic product gradually by 2030. Furthermore the group called for strategically directing R&D activities to finding solutions to the major challenges of our time.

The starting point of this project is mission-driven innovation policy, which has gained attraction around the world as governments seek new solutions to societal challenges like climate change, digitalisation, and social services. Lately, the importance of finding working solutions has been highlighted eg. by the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development, the IPCC reports and the Covid-19 pandemic. Also the European Commission has adopted missions in its Horizon Europe 2021-2027 program. In Finland, mission orientation has emerged, for example, in the Agenda for Sustainable Development, Business Finland's pilot missions, and the evaluation of the Academy of Finland.

The aim of this project has been to investigate how mission-driven innovation policy can be directed to accelerate significant and desirable societal transitions, and to make recommendations on how the government can implement directional mission-driven research and innovation policy in practice.

Mission-driven research and innovation policy provides the government with an approach for making strategic choices and prioritisations and for steering cross-societal cooperation towards shared objectives. It does not offer a solution to all problems, but is instead suited for addressing complex societal challenges that cannot be solved with the means that are currently available. Mission-driven research and innovation policy is guided and constituted by five basic principles.

- **Directionality** refers to steering societal development towards commonly agreed objectives.
- **Orchestration** refers to creatively steering and engaging with multiple stakeholders and resources.
- **Collaboration** involves coordinating and aligning the agendas, expectations, and actions of different stakeholders to achieve policy objectives flexibly, efficiently, and innovatively.
- **Crossing sectoral boundaries** involves utilizing the full potential of different government sectors and societal actors in solving missions.
- **Experimentation** involves openly experimenting with solutions to achieve a shared objective. Missions are led directionally (top-down), but different actors seek solutions flexibly through experimentation (bottom-up).

## The Finnish Model for implementing directional mission-driven research and innovation policy

This project assessed the conditions and requirements for implementing missions in Finland analytically and empirically. Based on these, it is clear that there is a demand for new ways of working in societal problem-solving. Experts recognize the need for directional research and innovation policy, but also the need to develop and strengthen the structures and capabilities of the government administration for its utilization. The biggest challenges relate to the management, coordination, and implementation of cross-administrative large and long-term projects, especially from a budget and performance management perspective. Readiness should also be strengthened in terms of monitoring and evaluation, as leading strategic choices requires continuity and learning.

Implementing directional research and innovation policy thus requires new structures, processes, capabilities, and ways of working, especially within the public administration – but also more broadly in society. Based on theoretical and empirical analysis, a model was developed in the project to respond to this demand. The model consists of the functions and eight tasks that are prerequisites for the successful leadership and implementation of strategic choices in a mission-driven manner.

## An operative model of the functions and tasks required for a successful implementation of missions



The model consists of the functions and eight tasks that are prerequisites for the successful leadership and implementation of strategic choices in a mission-driven manner.

**The outer circle of the model consists of four collaborative functions that all actors involved in the mission must commit to in order for the mission's objective to be achievable.** These functions describe the preconditions for a successful implementation of the mission. This collaboration can be structured through four fundamental functions: 1) defining the mission, 2) solving the mission, 3) learning from the mission, and 4) redirecting the mission. A successful mission requires a broad range of actors to be committed to its goal. Solutions should be developed and tested in a decentralized manner, but the insights gained from this experimental problem-solving should be interpreted together. In addition, the mission should be open for revision and redirection as new information emerges about e.g. effective practices, key bottlenecks or the need to bring in new stakeholders. Thus the mission combines top-down but widely accepted direction with open and decentralized experimentation. Strong orchestration is needed to seek balance with these two features and to find concrete solutions to challenges. Additionally, the

mission itself is an experimental entity that can be iterated and redirected based on new information.

**The inner circle of the model describes the tasks that the government must take responsibility for and carry out as it orchestrates a mission.** The implementation of the collaborative functions (i.e., the outer circle of the model) requires that the government have a clear responsibility and active role in leading the missions. The government is responsible for preparing the definition of missions, orchestrating problem-solving, facilitating peer learning, and building a knowledge base that can be used to iterate missions. The orchestration of a mission can be described through eight concrete tasks that the governmental actor responsible for the missions must deliver;

1. Preparing the definition of the mission; Defining a mission is a dialogical process in which decision-makers decide which challenge to address through, but where the definition of the challenge and approach is co-developed with actors involved in solving the mission.
2. Facilitation of co-development of missions; The purpose of co-development is to expand the knowledge base of the mission, clarify the problem definition, and commit the the participating actors to problem-solving.
3. Designing portfolios; Monitoring, evaluation, and learning require new approaches. Solving the mission requires moving from a broad directional challenge and goal towards specific sub-challenges and goals. The mission should establish the framework for projects but not give rigid definitions of the solutions needed. The actors implementing the projects in a mission portfolio should be given the freedom to develop solutions from their own perspectives, as well as the opportunity to test their feasibility in their own contexts.
4. Facilitation of peer learning; Although challenges are solved in a decentralized manner in different projects, knowledge needs to be shared among actors. Peer learning ensures that actors learn from each other, and that good practices can be adopted widely. At the same time, the purpose of peer learning is to generate information about bottlenecks that need to be addressed for the mission to succeed.
5. Evaluation and monitoring; Following only technological and commercial metrics is not sufficient in addressing missions. Societal impact must also be

monitored. The government must support the breakdown of the main goal of the mission into concrete sub-goals for shorter-term mission portfolios, and build credible impact pathways between them.

6. Addressing bottlenecks; Learning processes accumulate timely information on bottlenecks that prevent or slow down problem-solving. Bottlenecks can be, for example, legislative, economic or functional, and must be addressed at the right level of government in order for missions to succeed.
7. Iteration and redirection of missions; Based on continuous peer learning, monitoring and evaluation, the governmental actor responsible for the mission prepares a proposal for revising and refining the mission if necessary.

The model should not be interpreted as a linear process description, but rather the different functions and tasks of the government are intertwined - some of them happen simultaneously, such as solving missions and learning from them, while others cover the entire mission cycle, such as monitoring and evaluation. However, they are presented in the model so that the previous function or task is a prerequisite for the next. For example, the mission definition phase comes before starting solutions can be developed. The model is iterative, meaning that the approach used for each function and task is open for revision and redirection as new information arises.

## Recommendations: Routes for Implementing the Operative Model

Based on this, we suggest three routes for implementing the operative model in the Finnish context that can be seen as complementary approaches. The routes mainly depart from the existing structures in the government administration, but require adjustments in these structures for successful implementation to be possible. The development of skills and capabilities is necessary in all routes, but there are different alternatives for the locus and structures of the actor responsible for implementing missions, and new structures might also be needed. In practice, both route 1 and either route 2 or 3 are needed to implement mission-driven innovation policy.

**Route 1: Decentralized, networked operating model - strengthening skills and capabilities throughout public administration.** Implementing missions requires new skills and capabilities in government administration. This could mean, for

example, organizing mission working groups as part of existing structures and functions to create communities of practice.

**Route 2: Lead ministry model - sectoral responsibility for implementation by a lead ministry.** Implementation of missions can be assigned to individual ministries, or lead ministries, depending on the mission's topic and the ministry's area of responsibility. The lead ministry can and should also lead the joint mission work across ministries to ensure learning. The strengths of the lead ministry model include the ability to start missions relatively quickly and efficiently through existing structures and processes, and to utilize the strong substantive expertise of the ministry. However, it only offers limited opportunities to reform current practices and to lead broad cross-sectoral cooperation effectively. Possible solutions to this could include separate mission funding and stronger cross-administrative political guidance and leadership.

**Route 3: Centralized guidance in government administration - joint implementation responsibility of the government.** Mission-driven innovation policy seeks to provide the government and public administration with a new model for achieving political objectives and solving societal challenges. One of its key promises is to strengthen administrative implementation capability. Effective implementation of extensive cross-cutting missions requires shared responsibility and centralized guidance from the government. The successful implementation of the mission model requires strong political guidance for missions and independent mission funding that enables truly cross-administrative and cross-sectoral collaboration management.

Right now there is a lot of buzz and real interest surrounding mission-oriented innovation policy. Several countries are preparing or implementing various mission models, and the EU's five missions are well underway. The proposed mission model and its implementation routes are in line with international development. However, the comprehensive and full-scale national implementation of Finland's mission-oriented innovation policy model would set a strong example of a concrete way to leverage the added value produced by mission-oriented policies. Implementing the mission model will require investments from Finland, but it also creates opportunities for successfully

leading strategic choices; it presents a way to achieve ambitious societal goals and solutions that we truly need in the 2020s.



## Further information:

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