

## The Mission Led Approach

# How to set up and deliver a Mission with high impact

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In the 2021 Life Sciences Vision, the Government announced the launch of seven Health Care Missions<sup>1</sup> to forge ground-breaking advances against diseases through a “Mission-led” approach, and then Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a further Mission to tackle dementia in August 2022<sup>2</sup>. Our own experience from running a Mission for over four years, validates that this approach has the potential to achieve long-lasting impact. Such an approach can: create target-driven partnerships with organisations sharing common goals, allow for rapid progress and build on unique strengths in the sector. A Mission can coalesce diverse groups into an implementation programme that no one other organisation (e.g. charity, NHS, funders or government bodies) can run on its own. We believe Missions are here to stay.

Founded in April 2018, the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission was set up to design and deliver a new national strategy to tackle brain tumours following a round-table hosted by the Government. The leadership team of the Brain Cancer Mission has worked with national stakeholders to design and deliver programmes to accelerate research, advance the UK’s trial infrastructure, create NHS training programmes and transform care for today’s patients. In this paper, our team seeks to share some of the most important lessons learned and describe the challenges encountered throughout our four and a half year journey. In this time, we have built a reputable process during which the Mission life-cycle evolved through four different phases. We also provide a checklist to help prepare other teams to deliver their objectives effectively in the high-profile environments in which Missions are typically launched.

**We see **four stages** to take a mission from concept to a multi-programme portfolio:**



## 1. Hold your ground under the spotlight

The first phase entered by the team is the **Spotlight phase**. Almost immediately, teams might find themselves “under the spotlight”. At this point, the Mission has just been announced with a splash and teams encounter the attention of key individuals and organisations who are willing to contribute to the effort. There is a palpable energy and a multitude of ideas are pitched to the leadership team by existing organisations. At this stage, the team might experience outside pressure to immediately make major national announcements, publish position papers and spend money quickly. Despite the perceived pressure, it is advisable to hold your nerve in this phase; and not be rushed into decisions. Be comfortable delaying major announcements until the new Mission is fully functioning. Note that Missions can be launched in relatively “full fields” with existing initiatives and organisations who have already been active for many years in the area. Be considerate of the previous efforts of these teams and reach out to them pro-actively to discuss collaboration and fitting in alongside their efforts. Emphasise that a Mission is founded to coalesce rather than compete. Accept that it may take some time to build your reputation and track-record in the field.

## 2. Design an operating model and narrow the focus

After the initial buzz of the Spotlight phase, the team will get to work properly and enter the **Set-up phase**, cementing the focus areas for the immediate future, and settle into a way of working. Teams may wish to conduct a broad review of the field to prioritise key challenges to tackle and identify core strengths to further build on. Alongside the strategy, give equal attention to designing a fit-for-purpose operating model that sets out the Mission’s structure, leadership and daily ways of working. Somewhat paradoxically, the operating model needs to allow for both decisive action (ensuring timely progress) while enabling broad consultation and sign off with the various partner organisations who are supporting the Mission’s effort. Picking the right people for the core functions in the Mission is pivotal. Naturally, decisions will be made around who is leading, who is running and who is advising. Also make sure to identify the stakeholders whose sign-off is needed prior to project launch. Enshrine a method to obtain their sign-off and keep them updated in your ways of working to prevent delays further down the line. The same applies to the relationship with your project sponsors and funders.

### Set-up Phase Checklist

#### ✓ Pick the right team

- **Academic lead:** with an excellent academic reputation to underwrite the rigour of the strategy
- **Day-to-day team:** with a can-do attitude to independently execute multiple workstreams
- **Diverse advisors:** solution-oriented people who collectively cover required expertise
- **Project Sponsors:** Organisations who fund or are set to benefit from the programme
- **Note:** *not all members who joined during the spotlight phase will remain as involved, so add new inspiring members as and when needed*

#### ✓ Design realistic milestones with an achievable timeline

- **Be realistic** in your timelines: many stakeholders need to sign off so plan accordingly
- It is **unlikely that you will meet all the milestones** for every programme, and naturally some programmes will progress much faster than others
- **Refine and adapt milestones** along the way and consider focusing your efforts on a select few milestones in the first instance

### 3. Listen to the community when shifting from strategy to delivery

Once the strategy is complete and people are in place, the Mission will enter its most testing phase – shifting gears from strategy into **Delivery Mode**. Prior to launch the team should commit time to plan how to fully engage the community to ensure active participation and community buy-in. It is also important to revisit the staffing model: a team that was comfortable designing a strategy might not be fully equipped to effectively deliver an entire programme. Consider whether you have sufficient resources on the team, and whether they have the right decision-making powers to run the programme end-to-end. This delivery phase marks a significant transition and commences as soon as the first project with measurable impact is launched into the community. Do not be tricked into endless project plan review cycles: Once the plan is complete, obtain sponsor sign-off and adhere to the published timelines. The key is to “just start” and trust that you can adjust the project in flight to overcome any potential hurdles you might experience. Mission projects by nature are national and transformational, so accept that this project will be in the spotlight and inevitably closely scrutinised by all involved. Expect lots of feedback, and pay close attention in particular to the constructive elements of that feedback. If delivered successfully, the Mission will gain trust and start to build on its reputation, which is key when entering the final phase of the Mission life-cycle.

#### Delivery Phase Checklist

##### ✓ Evidence the impact of the project

- This is fundamental to prove “return on investment”
- Spend time producing impact reports for project sponsors

##### ✓ Adjust your project based on user feedback

- You will likely receive both positive and negative feedback, ensure to carefully consider these
- Sometimes your fiercest critics or most enthusiastic recipients of the projects may prove themselves to be great people to incorporate into the Mission leadership

##### ✓ Make the most of the small team

- Your team is likely somewhat understaffed and underfunded so it is key to ensure the team's welfare is protected

##### ✓ Assign the team a budget of unrestricted funding to enable smooth running of the programme

- Ensure this money is ringfenced without multi-layer sign-off to cover expected and unexpected programme costs

### 4. Leverage success and impact to grow in remit and size

After the successful delivery of its first project, the Mission will enter the **growth and renewal phase** by continuing to build on its reputation and achievements. The Mission can leverage its success to obtain more funding, attract more people and raise the profile of its programmes. Report the returns on investment by producing impact reports and attending conferences. During this phase, the team should revisit the operating model to reflect a Mission that has grown and evolved substantially. Define and enshrine

programme accountability, and secure ownership of intellectual property by working with legal professionals. Ensure longevity of the Mission by focussing on financial sustainability and creating lasting partnerships with supporting organisations. The TJBC Mission ended up incorporating as a community interest company with a membership subscription model to allow for a renewed focus on longevity, financial sustainability and clear ownership.

## About the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission CIC

Founded in 2018, the Mission answers a call to action led by Dame Tessa Jowell following her brain tumour diagnosis. The Government responded by convening members of the brain tumour community to design and a new national strategy. Today, the TJBCM delivers a national portfolio of eight transformative programmes and is incorporated as a Community Interest Company. The team has developed a Mission toolkit so others may deploy a similar approach to tackling challenging topics.

**80+**

NHS doctors, nurses, and scientists joined us to deliver our programmes

**28 of 31**

UK brain tumour centres participated in our Designation programme with 17 Centres designated as “Excellent”

**730+**

Brain tumour professionals active on the Mission’s digital learning platform

## TJBCM Leadership and Report contributors



**Dr Nicky Huskens**

TJBCM CEO. Previously Mission Director for four years and “first employee”.



**Prof Richard Gilbertson**

TJBCM Chair. Director of Cancer Research UK Cambridge Centre and Li Ka Shing Chair of Oncology (Cambridge).



**Prof Katie Bushby**

TJBCM Vice-Chair. Previously professor in Neuromuscular genetics and Vice Chair of the European Union Committee of Experts on Rare Diseases.



**Lord O'Shaughnessy**

TJBCM Strategic Advisor. Senior Partner at Newmarket Strategy. Previously Under Secretary of State for Health tasked with setting up the TJBCM.



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Daughter of Tessa Jowell and patient advocate.

## Contact

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