



Reflections on Transformative Movement Building

Lessons from the Evaluation of
Move to End Violence

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Move to End Violence (MEV) is an initiative of the NoVo Foundation, designed to strengthen the collective capacity of the movements to end gender-based violence in the United States. The program provides an intensive and holistic two-year experience to five cohorts, each consisting of 15-21 Movement Makers. Grounded in principles of beloved community, liberation and equity, organizational development, transformational leadership development, and movement building for social change, MEV seeks to grow and expand strong, innovative, and sustainable movements to end violence against all girls and women, including those who are cis and trans and those who are gender non-conforming.

Core elements of the program are: six convenings set in restorative settings; an emphasis on self and collective care; physical practice and experiential learning; an international trip to explore transnational movement solidarity; learning that is integrated into organizational work; and general support and organizational development grants for participating organizations.

Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) has served as MEV's learning and evaluation partner since the beginning, initially working with the NoVo Foundation in February 2010 during the design phase for MEV. Over the last ten years, SPR has documented the development of MEV's theory of change, gathered and synthesized feedback on convenings and meetings, administered pre and post social network analysis surveys for each cohort, and conducted over 200 in-depth interviews with cohort members, coupled with over 70 in-depth interviews with faculty, staff, alumni and other movement leaders. This information has been synthesized into baseline and final reports for each cohort, and formative memos after each convening.

These different data sources point to the ways in which MEV has:

- Nurtured a highly diverse, interconnected, and **expanding network of leaders** committed to ending violence;
- Moved the program's design and operations into progressively deeper **alignment with its values**, a process that required ongoing vulnerability, humility, and flexibility on the part of staff and faculty; and
- Generated **powerful lessons** on transformational leadership development and movement building.

As MEV enters its fifth and final cohort, staff, faculty, and alumni are looking to share key capacity building lessons from MEV with Movement Makers and other field leaders. This evaluation brief provides details on the three core themes outlined above in order to support MEV's efforts to tell its story and the stories of those whose lives have been touched by the program over the last ten years.

Nurturing and Expanding a Network of Leaders

In her book, “How Change Happens: Why Some Social Movements Succeed While Others Don’t,”¹ Leslie Crutchfield describes how effective “leaderful” movements empower grassroots leaders to step forward, consist of coalitions of like-minded organizations and other “adversarial allies” at the “margins” of the movement, and are driven by the vision and voices of those who are most impacted by the problem to be solved.

A central dimension of MEV’s story arc is the role it has played in expanding the base of who is seen as a leader within the movements to end violence, building alliances across movements and sectors, and centering the voices of impacted communities. This aspect of MEV’s work needs to be understood within the context of the ways that white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness devalue the contributions, lived experience, and leadership of impacted communities. Centering the leadership of those most impacted creates spaces with the possibility of liberation and the repairing of wounds that impede cross racial and cross movement solidarity.

As of spring of 2020, 74 diverse Movement Makers had experienced the MEV program. Comprised of predominantly women (91%), these Movement Makers are ethnically and racially diverse (74% identify as people of color), work in all regions of the country, and are members of varied social movements. Some work in mainstream domestic violence or sexual assault prevention organizations, while others work in grassroots advocacy and membership-driven organizations focused on issues such as prison reform or immigration. Many Movement Makers are survivors of violence themselves, and work closely in partnership with specific impacted populations of women.

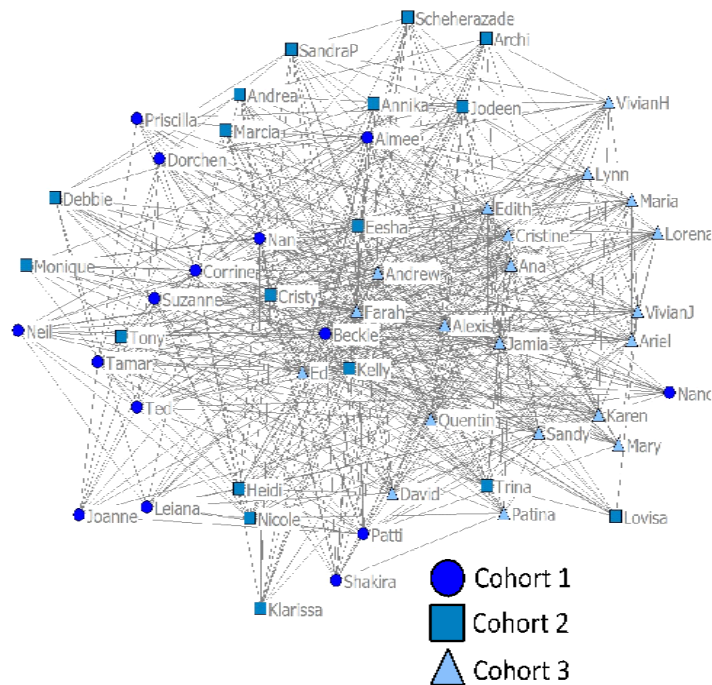
Interviews with Movement Makers consistently point to individual transformation and leadership development as a core outcome of participation in the program. One outcome nearly all Movement Makers have reported is a deeper understanding and dedication to practices that support health and sustainability, both for themselves and their organizations. Rooted in physical and/or spiritual practice, this outcome is a powerful counterweight to the self-sacrifice and burnout so often characterizing leaders in social movements. The second most common theme emerging from interviews is an enhanced confidence in and understanding of how to step into and “own” their movement leadership. This was particularly important for women of color leaders and leaders from under-resourced organizations. MEV provided these Movement Makers with a national platform, as well as with tools, resources and relationships that helped them recognize their own leadership and step more fully into it.

Finally, the relationships that have been formed among Movement Makers, both within and across cohorts, are crucial because interpersonal relationships are the foundation of any movement work. MEV has nurtured relationships among movement leaders that would likely not have developed without MEV, creating a robust and resilient network. The network graphic

¹ Crutchfield, Leslie (2018). How Change Happens: Why Some Social Movements Succeed While Others Don’t.

to the right shows cohort relationships at the close of Cohort 3,² illustrating a dense and interconnected network, with central actors from all of the cohorts.

These relationships have resulted in formal substantive exchange, as cohort members provide trainings and workshops at one another’s organizations, present at conferences together, and work on shared campaigns. Movement Makers broke new ground by foregrounding issues such as Black and Indigenous solidarity and by centering long-overdue conversations about race, equity, and liberation. By building relationships that bridge race, ethnicity, gender, geography, language, religion, and movement foci, MEV has helped to promote shared understanding and resiliency within and across the movements to end violence.



Alignment with Programmatic and Operational Values

Another part of MEV’s story arc is the evolution of the program over time. Inspired by Movement Makers and broader shifts in progressive movements, MEV program staff and faculty have engaged in an ongoing cycle of reflection and action (“praxis”) that has gradually brought the structures of the program more fully into alignment with its values.³ This process has helped the faculty to let go of “over design,” based in habits of internalized racial oppression such as hyper vigilance and over compensation, and to free up time and space for informal interactions. MEV staff and faculty have gradually reduced structured activities during convenings and focused more on providing the container and supports that enable Movement Makers to show up as their full selves. Key innovations include:

- **Shared leadership and co-design.** In July 2018, MEV launched a co-directorship model, which was a pivotal step towards actualizing MEV’s values of liberation, shared leadership, and interdependence. Having two strong women of color leaders, with complementary strengths, as co-Directors of the program has helped MEV to be more

² Cohort 4 is not represented in this data. We conducted a full network survey at the end of Cohort 3, making this data the most comprehensive. We will conduct another network-wide survey at the end of Cohort 5.

³ Praxis is a concept described by Pablo Friere, in his seminal work the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, as a cycle whereby people reflect upon their reality to transform it through further action and critical expression.

responsive, resilient, and flexible, while promoting life balance and sustainability. MEV also moved to an all women of color staff and core training team, using principles of shared leadership to guide decision making and design. Similarly, co-design with cohort members has been a central part of MEV since Cohort 2, in recognition that cohort members should define and drive their own learning.

- **Intergenerational programming that allows parents and guardians to show up as their whole selves.** Many of the Movement Makers are primary caregivers, which is an obstacle to them being fully present during MEV's weeklong convenings. To address this issue, MEV created a policy to cover expenses for caregivers and Movement Makers' children to accompany them to convenings. After initially covering travel expenses, MEV expanded its support to include stipends for the caregivers who accompanied Movement Makers. The introduction of the Children's Camp in Cohort 4, however, took this support one step further. The camp operated in parallel to the convening, providing enriching educational opportunities for Movement Makers' children (and their caregivers). In Montgomery, Alabama, for instance, children and caregivers learned about the civil rights movement by visiting local museums and landmarks, acting as an MEV "summer camp-like" experience. The convening spaces were opened up to children and caregivers during certain periods, creating a joyful intergenerational movement space that helped to ground the cohorts' work in a sense of shared purpose and focus on the future.
- **More expansive understanding of physical practice and embodiment.** Since the beginning of MEV there has been a strong focus on Forward Stance and the practice of Tai Ji as a medium through which individuals can learn to move together and align energies. Forward Stance is a practice designed to bring awareness to the body and the breath, explore what it means to move together with others, and to move in rhythm with others in a way that can further movement strategy. Although Tai Ji practice has continued to be an integral part of MEV, the convenings have also increasingly incorporated other cultural forms of collective movement, such as dance, in recognition of the ways that different cultures practice embodiment, connection, and rhythmic attunement.
- **Focus on healing and spiritual practice.** Those who work in social movements often have experienced trauma and are also vulnerable to burnout, which is one reason MEV has consistently focused on self-care, healing, and grounding in ancestral wisdom as a way to promote the sustainability of movement leadership and wholeness. That focus has expanded over time to include a focus on different forms of spiritual practice, through an introduction in convenings of an altar and a "Spirit Space," reserved for quiet reflection. Cohort members lead optional spiritual practice sessions in the mornings prior to the beginning of formal programming, and Movement Makers of varied faith traditions lead prayers to ground the cohort's work in a shared sense of purpose. Finally, Cohort 4 was the first cohort to have access to healing practitioners at convenings, including those who provided reiki, body work, and plant/herbal medicines.

- **Increased inclusivity through the incorporation of language justice.** For most of its history, MEV programming has privileged English as the primary language and has not been accessible, let alone inclusive, of those that do not speak English. MEV had not historically translated its application or materials into other languages or included translators at its convenings. That changed with Cohort 4, when MEV took steps to understand language justice as part of liberation work and to understand language injustice as perpetuating violence. MEV started to incorporate language justice into its convening space and communication structures, which involves “building and sustaining multilingual spaces... so that everyone’s voice can be heard.”⁴ In the context of MEV, this meant presenting content in both English and Spanish, while providing real-time interpretation for both languages, so that English and Spanish were equally valued and speakers of each language were equally heard.
- **More intentionality in selecting and curating settings for convenings.** Finally, when MEV began, the focus was on selecting “restorative” settings for the convenings, which often meant rural and natural settings. MEV staff began to shift how they think about selecting settings, realizing that, as areas with few people of color, rural settings were often not safe or restorative; they instead began to select sites based on their significance in the history of social movements or the relationship to Movement Maker’s communities. MEV staff also made significant shifts in how they enter a convening space. Over the course of Cohort 4, for instance, the MEV team conducted site visits to all the convening spaces, grounded with local leaders, and held at least one planning meeting with venue staff on gender, race, and class, as well as on the hotel’s safety protocol.

Lessons on Transformational Leadership Development

The last core aspect of MEV’s “story arc” is the emergence of lessons on how to create and hold spaces where transformation can happen. The lessons framed below are not static or fully actualized: they are dynamic and still in a state of “becoming.” They emerged from each cohort in different ways and they are enabled by many of the operational shifts highlighted in the previous section.

- **Flexibility, responsiveness, and humility are fundamental characteristics of facilitation for transformative change.** Since the first cohort, MEV’s willingness to experiment, pause, reflect, and course-correct has been one of its strongest features. Because the context for each cohort experience and convening is unique, the faculty of MEV are constantly shifting and adapting the structure of convenings, often in real time, leading to impromptu realignment of goals and priorities in order to meet the current needs of the group. One of the largest lessons from MEV’s work is that adaptability,

⁴ Language Justice Toolkit. Communities Creating Healthy Environments.
https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/language_justice_toolkit.pdf

responsiveness, and deep listening are the most valued and vital skills held by program faculty.

- **Transformation and healing arise from connection, relationships, and the sharing of stories.** Relationship building, as a central component of MEV’s theory of change, is reflected not only in the cohort structure of MEV, but in the curriculum and pacing of the program. MEV invests in relationship building between diverse movement leaders, in part, to bridge ideological, political, and strategic differences that can result in movements working at cross purposes. The focus on relationship building, storytelling, joy and laughter is also a strategy for promoting healing and transformation. Towards this end, MEV allocates a considerable amount of time for cohort members to get to know one another as whole people in order to build mutual understanding, surface shared values, and identify common purpose.
- **Attention to power dynamics is an iterative and ongoing practice.** It is essential to not underestimate the subtle and overt ways that anti-Blackness, transphobia, and other forms of oppression will play themselves out in movement spaces. No space is immune from such power dynamics, in that they are part of our collective story and the air we breathe. Facilitators must be ready to identify and intervene when oppressive behavior emerges, even from unexpected sources, in order to restore safety and model strategies for disrupting oppressive behaviors in a way that promotes collective learning and accountability.
- **Spaciousness is both essential and attainable.** MEV’s first cohort experienced highly structured convenings and long days filled with curricular content, which often left Movement Makers exhausted. Slowly, in response to feedback from cohort members and a need for a trauma-informed approach to time, the agendas became more and more spacious. Cohort 3 achieved a level of spaciousness in their fifth convening, which enabled and supported a breakthrough conversation on Black liberation and Indigenous invisibility. The spaciousness could not have occurred without the willingness of the faculty to set aside their agenda and to “hold” rather than “direct” the conversation. That experience was a lesson about the value of letting go, stepping back, and providing the space for Movement Makers to go deeply into issues when needed. It was a lesson that carried forward and deepened with Cohort 4.
- **Beloved community requires holding each other accountable in the spirit of love and shared purpose.** Beloved community, a concept championed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has long been a part of MEV’s vision for the type of community it wants to build and the broader change it hopes to engender. Beloved community is not a “utopian goal,” “devoid of interpersonal” conflict, but rather an achievable vision “in which all people share in the wealth of the earth.”⁵ As MEV has progressed, faculty have been purposeful about dispelling the belief that beloved community is about everyone “getting along.” In

⁵ The King Center website: <https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>

contrast, they frame beloved community as a process of operationalizing the values that movements are striving for and reflecting on the ways that one is or is not in alignment with those values. Instead of avoiding conflict, being in beloved community requires that people identify when harm has occurred and hold each other accountable so that trust can be restored and relationships can be strengthened. It takes time to develop the shared language needed for respectful feedback processes that repair harm and strengthen community.

Conclusion

As MEV enters its last two years, the care, dedication, and love that has been put into the program by staff, faculty, and cohort members have yielded lessons and returns on multiple levels. The stories of MEV's impact are multi-fold, but surely must forefront the deep investments the program has made to strengthen the leadership of those most impacted by violence, the relationships developed among leaders from allied movements, and the key lessons learned on how to support transformation. It is essential to underscore the ways that staff, faculty and Movement Makers have refocused attention on the need to address the root causes of violence and interrogated the ways in which power and privilege play out within and between movement organizations. And, most significantly perhaps, an important part of MEV's story is the way that MEV's leaders have continued to reflect, learn, and evolve in response to Movement Makers' experiences and in an effort to more fully actualize the programs guiding values.

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