Move to End Violence

Cohort 4
Final Report
Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2018, the 21 members of Cohort 4 came together for the first time as participants in the Move to End Violence (MEV) program. Cohort 4 was the first MEV cohort to consist of all women of color and to include transgender Movement Makers. Cohort 4, in the words of one Alumni Movement Maker, was a “dream come true,” in part because their selection signaled a broader recognition (long espoused by the MEV program) that movements to end violence against women and girls cannot progress without centering the leadership of those that are most impacted by violence. It was a recognition that, as movement leaders who operate within multiple systems of oppression, Cohort 4 members were uniquely positioned to see and understand “the impact of problems that threaten all our humanity, and for leading the whole of humanity toward solutions and alternative futures.”

Building on the evaluation data gathered from January 2018 to December 2019, this Executive Summary of Cohort 4’s Final Report presents the findings from MEV’s evaluation partners, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), of Cohort 4’s experience, the outcomes achieved, and key lessons and implications arising from their experience.

The MEV Program

MEV is a 10-year initiative of the NoVo Foundation, designed to strengthen the collective capacity of movements to end gender-based violence in the United States. The program is guided by five interconnected and mutually reinforcing fundamentals: (1) beloved community, (2) liberation and equity, (3) transformational leadership development, (4) organizational development, and (5) movement building for social change. Through these fundamentals, the program seeks to make deep investments in and have an impact at the individual, organizational, and movement levels in order to promote strong, innovative, and sustainable movements to end gender-based violence.

Core elements that continue to be the hallmark of the program since its beginning are: six convenings set in restorative and natural settings; an emphasis on self-care and strategic thinking; physical practice and experiential learning; an international trip to engage in peer exchanges with allied organizations and movement activists; learning that is integrated into organizational work; and general support and organizational development grants for participating organizations.

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Although these cornerstones of the program have not changed, MEV has, since its inception, evolved. This evolution has been a part of MEV’s process of getting clearer on how to support women of color leadership to create lasting change, as well as in response to feedback from Movement Makers and broader shifts in progressive movements. The Cohort 4 cycle included unique features shaped by the feedback of prior cohort members and the members of Cohort 4. The shifts highlighted below occurred over the course of this cycle and are significant to the degree that they helped to move MEV into an even deeper alignment with its values.

- **Transition from a single executive director to shared women of color leadership.** When Jackie Payne stepped down as the MEV director in February 2018, MEV moved Priscilla Hung into leadership and committed to a co-directorship leadership model. In July 2018, MEV announced that Monica Dennis, a long-term faculty of MEV, would join the MEV staff as the co-director. The co-directorship model was a pivotal step towards actualizing MEV’s values of liberation, shared leadership and interdependence. Furthermore, faculty and Cohort 4 members lifted up how powerful it was to have two strong women of color leaders, with complementary strengths, as co-directors of the program.

- **Shift toward a more intergenerational program that allows parents and guardians to engage more fully.** With the first cohort, MEV created a policy to help cover expenses for caregivers and Movement Makers’ children to accompany them to convenings. The introduction of the Children’s Camp in Convening 5 of Cohort 4, however, took this support one step further: it was a profound investment in intergenerational leadership and the creation of an environment where parents and guardians could engage as their whole selves. The camp operated in parallel to the convening, providing enriching educational opportunities for Movement Makers’ children (and caregivers). Building off the success of the Children’s Camp in Convening 5, it was offered again in Convening 6.

- **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. 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 and embodiment, such as dance. This process continued throughout Cohort 4, with faculty incorporating diverse forms of physical practice and embodiment.

- **Increased focus on healing and spiritual practice.** Throughout the convenings, MEV offered an array of practices to promote self-care and healing. 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. Similarly, with Cohort 4, the wellness tables and space for spiritual practice that had been part of MEV for some time expanded to be a more complete Spirit Space, a space reserved for quiet reflection and different forms of spiritual practice.

- **More inclusivity through the incorporation of language justice.** For most of its history, MEV convenings have privileged English as the primary language and have not been accessible for those that do not speak English. MEV has not historically translated its application or materials into other languages or included interpreters at its convenings. That changed with Cohort 4, when MEV took steps to incorporate language justice into its convening space, which involves “building and
sustaining multilingual spaces... so that everyone’s voice can be heard.”

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 intentional engagement and exchange with international advocates. While the international learning exchange is not new for MEV, Cycle 4 was the first time that Movement Makers engaged fully with a cohort of advocates from the country being visited. In Guatemala, Cohort 4 Movement Makers joined a group of women advocates convened by Just Associates (JASS). With the incorporation of language justice, the MEV Movement Makers and advocates from Honduras and Guatemala were able to participate in a deep exchange of ideas and experiences. The inclusion of an international cohort also enhanced the degree to which the international convening was an authentic exchange. A video entitled “Coming Together” from the international exchange further elaborates on these ideas and can be viewed here.

- New opportunity for a “domestic exchange.” To create a space for Movement Makers that could not travel to Guatemala, MEV faculty hosted a domestic exchange in Houston, Texas. This domestic exchange brought in a group of activists from Houston to discuss anti-Blackness, transphobia, and immigrant rights. Conversations and highlights from this domestic exchange can be found here.

- Shift in power to the cohort through co-design and cohort-only time. MEV first incorporated co-design by cohort members into Cohort 2, strengthening that aspect of the program with Cohort 4. The Cohort 4 Movement Makers also felt that it was important for them to meet as a group without faculty present, so during Convening 5, MEV built cohort-only time into the formal convening agenda. Movement Makers used this time to deepen relationships with one another, develop a radical philanthropy stance, and discuss how to push movements forward.

- Movement away from structured activities as a way of demonstrating the MEV core fundamentals. Finally, as MEV leans more into cohort leadership and spaciousness, it is shifting away from structured, faculty-led and designed activities that unintentionally replicate hierarchy and deficit thinking. Instead of directly teaching the fundamentals, MEV has moved towards demonstrating them through the larger structure and culture of the program, which requires more flexibility and “presence” from faculty.

Overview of Cohort 4

As stated earlier, Cohort 4 was unique from previous cohorts in that it was made up of all women of color and it included two transgender Movement Makers. Cohort 4 Movement Makers come from all over the country and work at organizations ranging considerably in size and operating in varied but interrelated facets of movements to end violence (e.g., sexual violence prevention, racial justice, criminal justice, reproductive health, economic justice). When selected to participate in

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3 Just Associates (JASS) is a NoVo Foundation Grantee. They are a global human rights network of activists, popular educators, and scholars who operate in 31 countries, including throughout Central America.
MEV, nine of the Movement Makers were executive directors, six were directors, and six were in associate or organizer positions. As a group, SPR’s baseline social network survey showed that they were far less connected to one another or to MEV alumni than any previous cohort.

Several of the faculty and staff of MEV said that they went into Cycle 4 under the assumption that having a cohort of all women of color would facilitate the development of a sense of safety, making it easier for the group to begin work with one another. In fact, it took more time, or at least as much time, as it had taken previous cohorts to develop mutual trust. Some cohort members questioned why they were selected, wary of tokenism. Several faculty and Cohort 4 members noted that, in the absence of whiteness, the group struggled more openly with internalized racial oppression and movement habits, such as rescuing behaviors. Cis-gender privilege and transphobia were also a challenge for cohort members and faculty.

The degree of professional and personal challenges faced by Cohort 4 members over the course of their participation speaks powerfully to the challenges facing women of color leaders in movements to end violence. By the end of Convening 4, eight Movement Makers had gone through a professional transition over the course of their cohort experience, and several women had been pushed out of their positions in ways that were painful and traumatic. Some of these Movement Makers experienced serious financial difficulties, as they sought to find other positions in the field. On a personal level, at least two cohort members experienced the death of a loved one and at least four Movement Makers, all executive directors of their organizations, developed stress-related illnesses or injuries. Finally, Cohort 4 was the first cohort to occur entirely during the Trump administration, which impacted Movement Makers personally and professionally, contributing to their feelings of overwhelm and burnout.

Although it took time for Cohort 4 to develop trust, by Convening 6, many had formed deep, caring relationships with one another. Many described these relationships as particularly close because they were able to share with one another what they go through “as women of color in this work.” They also built a sense of cohort identity around the unique perspectives they have as resilient women of color leaders who are also survivors. As one Cohort 4 member described, “We’re the last girl that MEV is talking about. We are an entire cohort of the last girl that MEV is talking about.”

**Stories of Impact**

Overall, Cohort 4 members identified the following key outcome areas:

- **Many Movement Makers felt that their involvement in MEV increased their confidence in their individual leadership.** Specifically, Movement Makers shared that they have a greater belief in their abilities to lead organizations, feel more equipped to advocate for themselves, and can better own their power as a leader. Some Movement Makers described how their MEV participation provided valuable time to reflect on their leadership to more clearly define their purpose as a leader. For
example, Movement Makers shared that they have a deeper understanding of the “why” behind their work, their purpose in the broader movement context, and their own strengths as a leader. Furthermore, a couple cohort members valued the way in which MEV built them up as leaders in their own right, separate from their organizations.

• **For some Movement Makers, MEV resources, support, and opportunities strengthened their skills and knowledge around how to lead organizations.** The MEV curriculum supported Movement Makers with acquiring language, frameworks, and practice opportunities (e.g., opportunities to facilitate during convenings) that supported and validated their development as leaders. MEV supported Movement Makers to push their thinking around their positionality and power within the movement to further develop their leadership.

• **Some Movement Makers described that MEV had kept them in the movement by deepening their practices related to sustaining themselves and preventing burnout.** The MEV spaciousness and Spirit Space and ritual and healers on site allowed Movement Makers to deepen their practice around healing and self-care and strengthen their emotional and spiritual intelligence.

• **Some Movement Makers were able to integrate MEV concepts and culture into their organizations such as self-care, feedback, and racial equity and liberation.** For some Movement Makers, coaches helped them look beyond their organization’s immediate situation and explore possibilities for the organization that align better with Movement Makers’ values. Resources such as the “My Healthy Organization” assessment and the Management Center workshop helped some Movement Makers’ organizations build capacity in ways in which they did not previously have access. For Movement Makers that were able to attend regional workshops and invite staff, regional workshops helped Movement Makers build the capacity of their organizations and get organizational buy-in.

**Connections Among Cohort 4 Members**

Over the course of MEV, Cohort 4 became much more interconnected. The figure below shows all connections (both formal and informal) at baseline and the end of the MEV program, clearly demonstrating a marked increase in connections.

**Growth in Cohort 4 Connections**
In addition to strengthening informal and formal relationships, Cohort 4 developed into a *cohesive cohort*. Increased connectivity not only supported cohort members to develop personally and professionally, but also strengthened movement ties across sectors and content areas to contribute to movement-level impacts.

**Lessons on Movement Building**

Each Cohort experience yields lessons on the complexity of movement building. The following are some such lessons from Cohort 4:

**Lesson 1: Supporting women of color leaders is an essential movement strategy to end violence against women and girls worldwide.** Although not all the respondents that we interviewed felt that MEV was ready to “hold” another all-women of color-cohort there was broad agreement that supporting women of color’s leadership is a necessary movement strategy. The external challenges faced by members of this cohort speak to the need for women of color-only spaces, where they can talk about the unique circumstances they face and better understand their shared experience. As a movement strategy, it is important to expand the field’s understanding of who is a leader and what experiences, skills, and insights are needed in order to influence real social change.

**Lesson 2: There is a lot of work to be done in order to address cis-gender privilege and transphobia within the movement.** MEV engaged Trans*Visible to provide training at their faculty retreat prior to the launch of Cohort 4 in order to raise their awareness around issues of gender justice. The faculty team was aware that they were moving into unchartered territory. Yet, still, the team was caught off guard by how quickly cis-gender privilege and transphobia surfaced within the cohort and the dynamic that it created in the group. There were clear missteps taken in how faculty addressed incidents of transphobia: their responses were not as proactive or immediate as they could have been. Although they had a transgender man on faculty, who engaged the group in Convening 2, they would have benefited from having a transgender woman as faculty who could relate more directly with the needs of members of the cohort. If these issues surface so clearly in the MEV community, then it is certain that they are a much larger issue within the broader movement. In short, there is a lot more work to be done here.

**Lesson 3: MEV can make a significant contribution to the field by supporting a broader conversation about how anti-Blackness and Indigenous invisibility impede collective action in allied movements.** Cohorts 3 and 4 have both grappled with the issues of anti-Blackness and Indigenous invisibility and the often unspoken tensions that exist in the movement around these issues. The faculty team and alumni that were interviewed consistently raised this as an area where MEV could surface insights that could have significant influence over the broader field.
Lesson 4: Co-design and co-leadership are essential building blocks of transformative leadership development and movement building. One of the most persistent themes from our final round of interviews was the value of co-design, both for the cohort members and the faculty team. One faculty member said, “It really deepened [the cohort’s] ability to practice together and gave them an opportunity to practice their leadership in a different way. And it provided a way for them to practice modeling and accountability in other spaces within the practice community.” Several respondents noted the personal power of the experience of participating in the co-design process, with one indicating that it provided her with new and unique insights into the types of issues with which faculty are grappling. Others talked about how important it is that Movement Makers see that their voice is valued by faculty and that they are recognized as movement leaders as they come into the program. Finally, one faculty member spoke about how MEV is moving away from the “expert” model that was part of the initial framework for MEV, towards the process of co-discovery and shared leadership.

Lesson 5: Responsiveness, flexibility, and humility are fundamental characteristics of facilitation for transformative change. Since the first cohort, MEV’s willingness to pause, reflect, and course-correct has been one of its strongest features. Even given this history, several faculty members spoke about how Cohort 4 surprised them in unique ways that were at times emotionally taxing. As with previous cohorts, the faculty of MEV shifted and adapted the structure of convenings to respond to cohort dynamics, in this case giving the cohort more space to hold their own conversations. One of the largest lessons from MEV’s work is that adaptability, responsiveness, and deep listening are perhaps the most essential roles that faculty play.

Lesson 6: Beloved community takes time to develop and it is not conflict-free: it requires holding each other accountable in a spirit of love and shared purpose. In Cycle 4, faculty were purposeful about dispelling the belief that beloved community is about “everyone getting along.” In contrast, they framed 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 alliances can be held.

Lesson 7: There is tremendous power in using values as a guiding framework for engaging in the work (including both operations and programming). MEV has made significant shifts in how it approaches its work, which has helped to bring the program more fully into alignment with its values. This includes the co-directorship structure, the children’s camp, the Spirit Space, the healing practitioners, and so on. It also includes how MEV chooses to enter a convening space. Over the course of Cohort 4, the MEV team conducted site visits to all the convening spaces and held at least one planning meeting with convening space staff on gender, race, and class, as well as on the hotels’ safety protocol.
Recommendations for Cohort 5

Below are recommendations for Cohort 5 that arose from our conversations with Cohort 4 members, MEV faculty, coaches, and alumni.

- Develop a faculty team that aligns with the characteristics, lived experiences, and needs of the cohort.

- Conduct additional outreach to specific communities to broaden the diversity of strong applicants and carefully screen for readiness.

- Communicate more clearly in advance of the first convening about what people can expect from the program.

- Dedicate a day in the first convening to having cohort members talk with the coaching team, so that they can be paired with an organizational development coach that meets their needs.

- Shorten the length of the convenings, with flexibility to accommodate additional days for cohort-led discussions and trainings.

- Dedicate more time for cohort members to get to know one another’s work in a more concrete way so that they can begin working on shared projects earlier in the process.

- Be more purposeful in choosing locations for convenings that are meaningfully tied to movement history or that allow for cohort members to share their work.

- Strengthen the ties between the different cohorts.

Conclusion

As MEV enters the last two years of this 10-year initiative, the care, dedication, and love that has been put into the program by staff, faculty, and cohort members has yielded returns on multiple levels. The care and curation that has been put into the MEV community was evident at the cross-cohort convening in October, with its intergenerational and cross-racial celebration of spirit, wellness (in body and in mind), expression, and the power and promise of feminism. It showed how far MEV has come at building an inclusive coalition of powerful leaders, while also illustrating what beloved community looks like.