The Intersection of Practice, Purpose and Relationship Building: Stories from Move to End Violence

Executive Summary

December 16, 2022

Written By: Heather Lewis-Charp

Contributions by: Mahika Rangnekar, Julia Forte Frudden, and Kira Enriquez
Launched in 2010, Move to End Violence (MEV) was a 12-year initiative, funded by the NoVo Foundation, designed to strengthen the movements to end gender-based violence in the United States. The program provided an intensive and holistic two-year experience to five cohorts of movement leaders and their organizations. Core elements of the program are: six convenings set in restorative settings; an international convening to explore transnational movement solidarity; coaching and organizational development support; and general support grants for participating organizations. Over the life of the program, 93 individuals from 86 organizations participated in the cohort experience. Comprised of predominantly women, femmes, and non-binary folks (93%), these Movement Makers (MMs) are ethnically and racially diverse (86% identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Color - BIPOC), work in all regions of the country, and are members of varied social movements.

This report draws on data that MEV’s learning and evaluation partner, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), gathered over the course of the entire initiative, with an emphasis on data from an alumni survey conducted in winter 2021 and 25 in-depth interviews with alumni, facilitators, and staff that were conducted in the summer of 2022. The report captures the evolution of MEV’s structure and curricular elements over time, the unique cultures of MEV’s 5 cohorts, outcomes for MMs, and lessons for those looking to support transformative leadership development.

**Evolution of MEV’s Structure and Curricular Elements**

One of MEV’s most distinguishing features was the willingness of its leadership and staff to experiment, pause, reflect, and modify features of its program structure and approach to bring them into deeper alignment with social justice values and to be responsive to feedback from cohort members. Over time they worked to interrupt power dynamics inherent in funder driven initiatives, by (1) embracing shared leadership and co-design; (2) moving away from traditional capacity building approaches and towards a model of accompaniment; (3) taking an emergent approach to coaching and organizational development; and (4) engaging more authentically with international partners. They also worked to practice equity in their operations by (1) centering the leadership of those who are most impacted by violence; (2) providing caregiving support and family programming; (3) curating convening spaces to make them accessible and restorative; and (4) integrating language justice as an essential aspect of anti-violence.

The content of MEV’s curriculum and content also evolved over time, though the foundational tenets of the program remained relatively unchanged. Core curricular elements identified by MMs as most impactful included building Beloved Community, which provided opportunities for MMs to share and connect around shared purpose and to respectfully explore difficult issues. Physical practice through Forward Stance and Tai Ji, which foregrounded physical and experiential aspects of movement work, helped MMs get in touch with their breath and bodies.
Although spaciousness and self care were priorities from the start of MEV, the program got progressively better at reflecting these priorities within their convening agendas. Finally, in part through advocacy from MMs, MEV’s curriculum changed to incorporate a much deeper focus on racial equity and liberation and on spirituality and Healing Justice.

**Cohort Cultures**

Each of MEV’s five cohorts had their own unique cultures, which were reflective of the composition of each cohort, the program’s phase of development, the time and context in which the cohort met, and the distinct movement-related issues that each cohort grappled with. One of the defining characteristics of each cohort was the nature and content of their “courageous conversations,” which often were related to key tensions within movement spaces that interfere with solidarity. For some cohorts, these conversations were oriented towards critiquing aspects of MEV’s program design that were not meeting the political moment, whereas for others they were focused on addressing differences in perspectives rooted in MM’s distinct life experiences, identities, and positionalities within the movements. Whatever the nature of these conversations, one of the great strengths of MEV’s facilitation team was how they were able to respond to and hold space for these conversations, helping to support MMs as they sought to identify when harm occurred and hold each other accountable in ways that restored trust, strengthened relationships, and deepened Beloved Community.

**Individual, Organizational, and Movement Outcomes**

In the alumni survey, MMs reported that their MEV experience had transformative influences at the individual, organizational, and movement level, with these outcomes often increasing or deepening over time. At the individual level, MMs reported that their participation in MEV inspired them to apply for additional leadership opportunities, transition to more challenging and rewarding leadership roles and to “own” their roles within the movements to end gender-based violence. MMs also reported that MEV enhanced their commitment to and ability to advance equity and to practice self-care and healing. At the organizational level, MMs reported that MEV contributed to organizational capacity and sustainability: this was particularly true of MMs from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, which might reflect the time intensive nature of organizational change. MMs also reported changes in organizational policies and programs, particularly around promoting Racial Justice, centering those most impacted by violence, and fostering self care and healing.

MMs also reported significant movement-level outcomes, the foundation of which were the strong relationships that they made with one another. Many interviewees and survey respondents reported that these relationships were personally and professionally transformational. Social network maps illustrate how the MEV network grew and became more interconnected over time. The maps also show how formerly disconnected MMs formed
informal relationships with one another that subsequently, sometimes years after their cohort experience, developed into formal partnerships and collaborations. MMs collaborated to form new organizations and also shared their MEV learnings on racial justice and self care in ways that contributed to meaningful shifts in mainstream anti-gender-based violence organizations and coalitions.

**Lessons for Supporting Transformative Leadership Development**

Interviews with MEV MMs, leadership, staff, and facilitators point to four critical aspects of MEV’s model and approach that are important for supporting transformational leadership development.

- **The importance of creating practice spaces for movement leaders.** Through its convenings, MEV created a protected space for MMs to reflect, strategize, pose questions, and engage in dialogue with other movement leaders. These practice spaces were places for MMs to learn from others and actively confront assumptions, biases, and movement habits that interfered with their ability to grow and collaborate. MEV also supported one-on-one coaching which provided individualized or tailored support for MMs to problem solve around some of the issues raised in the convening spaces, as well as other challenges facing them and their organizations. Movement Makers repeatedly spoke of the love and support in which these spaces were held by MEV staff and the facilitation team as being unlike anything they had experienced in their careers.

- **The power of identifying and centering purpose (including values and vision).** Interviews with MMs also reverberate with stories about how MEV helped them to identify and name the underlying purpose or the “why” of their work within the anti-gender-based violence movements. Within the practice space of MEV, MMs told the stories of their people and situated themselves and their work within a broader historical context. They were able to move outside of the particularities of their organizational roles or advocacy strategies to connect with what motivates and sustains their ongoing commitment to movement work. By identifying their underlying purpose, they were able to recognize how they could collaborate with others who worked in different parts of the movements. Many MMs also shifted roles within the movements, or altered the direction of their organizations, to ensure that it was better aligned with their underlying purpose, values, and vision.

- **The transformative influence of relationship building.** MEV created the space for meaningful relationships to develop among diverse leaders. Movement Makers report that these relationships have supported them on a personal level, as they have faced hardships, and significantly deepened and broadened their work. Movement Makers
describe a catalytic shift in awareness when they realized that their deepest sense of purpose, what drives them to do their work and animates their life, is aligned with others who have different lived experience and who apply their purpose within a different context. This alignment of people’s “whys” led to unexpected collaborations and new imaginings.

- **There is a vital need to center and make visible BIPOC, Transgender and Gender-non-conforming (TGNC) leadership within the movements to end gender-based violence.** Creating practice spaces like MEV, particularly for BIPOC and TGNC leaders, is crucial for strengthening the movements to end gender-based violence. These leaders frequently lead small under-resourced organizations at the margins of the movements, while serving the populations who are most impacted by violence. BIPOC and TGNC MMs often reported that their organizations would likely not have survived without MEV or that the funding and organizational development support was transformative for their organizations. Likewise, MMs—particularly those that were transitioning positions—described how critical MEV’s support was. Beyond the tangible sources of support, the recognition associated with MEV along with the practice space it provided helped some of these leaders overcome imposter syndrome and self-doubt.

In conclusion, interviewees acknowledged the long arc of the struggle for change and emphasized the importance of patience and dedication. It takes time to see the influence of the types of transformative leadership development and relationship building that MEV provided. The effects of the cohort experience, particularly for those from later cohorts, will unfold over the next ten to twenty years as leaders enact their purpose in collaboration with others, taking what they learned from MEV and applying it in new and unexpected ways.