

## II. Executive Summary

In summer 2007, Movement Research completed its first-ever Strategic Plan. This Plan covers three fiscal years, from 2008 to 2010. In many ways, the planning process was fueled by the extraordinary artistic community served by Movement Research and by the organization's long history of accomplishment, a history that reflects the social, political and aesthetic discourse that have engaged contemporary artists over the past three decades.

Movement Research (MR) encourages and facilitates experimentation in and development of movement-based performance work. Founded in 1978, MR is one of the world's leading laboratories for the investigation of dance and movement-based forms. Valuing the individual artist, their creative process and their vital role in society, MR is dedicated to creating and implementing free and low-cost programs that nurture and instigate discourse and experimentation. MR strives to reflect the cultural, political and economic diversity of its community, including both artists and audiences alike.

Movement Research accomplishes its mission through a range of programs that serve an average of 10,000 artists, students and audience annually. Ongoing classes and workshops are taught by artist educators and innovators; creative residencies are offered for choreographers and movement-based artists; an annual festival brings together leaders in the field; and publications and public events provide artists with forums for discourse on a broad range of issues. As compared to other organizations, which may focus on presenting, commissioning artists or offering classes, MR has always nurtured the development of the artist's creative process, from the inception of an idea onward. MR provides a safe environment that encourages risk, innovation, discourse, critical feedback and even debate, and it supports artists throughout the arc of their artistic lives.

Highlights of some of its most prominent programs are as follows: Movement Research at the Judson Church is a free, highly visible, low-tech forum held at the historic Judson Church on Monday nights for exploring new ideas- and works-in-progress, since 1991. The Artist-in-Residence (A.I.R.) Program provides commissioning funds, subsidized rehearsal space, and other opportunities for an intergenerational group of 6-10 emerging to established artists every year. MR/Publishing includes the well-known *Performance Journal (PJ)*, produced in print (and now, online) since 1991 as well as a new online interactive forum called *Critical Correspondence (CC)* that encourages critical dialogue about dance amongst its readership. Classes and Workshops, including month-long MELT Intensives, offer ongoing adult education taught by established, progressive dance artists and attract local, national, and international students.

### The Context for Planning

The planning process emerged when Movement Research's leadership posed critical questions about its own survival, and what it would take to sustain and even grow the organization in contemporary times. In many ways, the history and challenges of MR reflect the challenges of the contemporary arts field over the past decade. For years, the organization had stretched its small budget in order to have considerable and ongoing impact. But dwindling funding and the increasing difficulty of managing an under-staffed, under-capitalized grassroots organization in real estate hungry New York City pushed the organization to the point of crisis. Over the past ten years the organization went through three changes in executive leadership and competition for funding intensified. After Carla Peterson joined the organization as Executive Director in 2002, an assessment of its financial shortfalls led to serious questions about the organization's future, and a commitment to developing strategies that would ensure Movement Research's survival.

Over its history, Movement Research has remained artist-centric in its programs, board and administration. Yet, MR exists in an utterly altered landscape today than when it was founded in 1978. Changes in funding, the economy, the needs of the younger generation, and New York real estate impinge more harshly now than ever before on artists and their ability to create and sustain their artistic practice. When the culture wars of the mid-1990s arrived and the U.S. Congress cut federal funding for the arts, the hardest hit were individual artists and experimental work – MR’s main constituency. The term “established artist” implies a level of stability that is often not there; in fact, long-time veterans currently struggle to make work *and* a living wage, now unable to sustain a livelihood off of teaching and performance in a way that was once possible. Yet, there is a community in New York, unlike anywhere else, that entices artists to stay rooted here. In addition, the needs and expectations of one of MR’s major target markets – college graduates – have changed significantly over the past two decades. Having experienced a broader curriculum than in a previous era, recent graduates now arrive in New York seeking classes at Movement Research, but also find similar offerings at competing studios. Unlike more mainstream studios, MR nurtures a community among artists interested in experimentation. However, sustaining this sense of community in an ever-intensifying real estate market in New York is a growing challenge. Organizations struggle to maintain their operations without permanent space. Some have moved to the periphery of the city, and the dance community has decentralized. In summary, given these pressures, MR had to look with fresh eyes at the artists it serves, the programs it offers, the fees it charges, and how all of the above would be marketed and administered.

## The Planning Process

The planning process occurred over a three-year period. Former Executive Director Carla Peterson began preliminary research, seeking the guidance of consultants MK Wegmann, Suzanne Callahan, and Janice Shapiro. MR hosted its first Town Hall Meetings for Artists to obtain artist and faculty input. Over the next year and a half, board and staff examined programs, operations and governance, and revised MR’s vision statement (Shapiro had joined the board and facilitated these early planning sessions). Board and staff identified strategies and action steps, developed program histories, and created the Movement Research timeline. With input from the board, consultants and the artist community, Peterson, with Assistant Writer Brooke Belott, wrote a draft of the plan. In December 2006, Barbara Bryan began as Executive Director and Kim Doelger as Managing Director. At that time, with the support of Altria Group, Inc., the staff and board finalized the plan. Two focus groups comprised of artists were convened to review this plan and provide their feedback. Callahan Consulting for the Arts was engaged to facilitate the final planning meetings and artist focus groups as well as edit the plan.

Two Faculty Town Hall Meetings (October 2004 and March 2006) were led by Jeremy Nelson (MR faculty and board member) and Peterson to seek out faculty feedback and incorporate it into this plan. Faculty candidly expressed concerns around contracts, policies, and teacher selection, as well as class configurations. They also made recommendations for programs (all of which are incorporated into this plan’s details).

Two Artist Focus Groups (April 2007) were enthusiastically attended by 16 artists who had been involved with the organization at various points in their careers for a wide range of time periods. Clearly artists have deep loyalty to Movement Research and are interested in helping shape its future. Artists were asked to comment on and rate the goals and strategies in this plan in two ways: a) according to how useful the strategy would be to *their own needs as artists*, and b) how useful they perceived the same strategy would be *for other artists* in the community. It is notable that the ratings overall were quite high. While it is important to note that the ratings represent a small sample of the hundreds of artists that MR serves, they appear to indicate a close meshing of this plan with artists’ own needs. One artist in the focus group spoke for many others in describing

MR's distinct approach in serving artists in saying, "*Unlike most institutions that get more rigid, it responds to where organic need emerges...[Movement Research] is fluid enough that it can... meet artists halfway. That's what is so unique about it.*"

## **The Plan: An Intentional Redirection**

The plan focuses on three major areas: programs, space and infrastructure.

Programs. Movement Research is modifying its approach to programs in order to respond to the needs of artists as stated above, with the goal of creating a closer sense of community. Serving artists at any stage of their career, MR is focusing on new opportunities for artists to interact by making stronger connections between its programs.

Space. Combining space for administration and programs will be key to the success of efficient operations, especially as Movement Research expands programs that require space.

Infrastructure. Movement Research can claim its place as an institution while it continues to operate in a grassroots manner. Since FY02, Movement Research has made remarkable progress in pulling itself back from the brink of closing its doors, having completely retired its debt in FY07. A re-energized and growing board and staff have seen the organization through its day-to-day operations with a view toward the bigger picture. Movement Research will always remain close to the ground in the way in which it works with artists and supports experimentation, but it must have an adequate level of staff and board support, along with the systems and technology, to support its vision. This shift began years ago and has been formalized more recently as its finances have improved and with the creation of this Plan.

## **Vision**

- Movement Research will continue to expand and deepen its singular contribution to the history and evolution of dance and performance exploration.
- Movement Research will deepen its commitment to meeting the needs of artists, by both sustaining existing and developing new programs, as specified in its mission.
- Movement Research will enhance its long-term viability by both acquiring physical space and bolstering its organizational structure, which supports staff while engaging artists at all levels of programming and governance.

## **Goals and Strategies**

Movement Research will achieve this vision through realizing the following five goals:

### **Goal 1. Evaluate and modify programs to increase their relevance and effectiveness.**

*[Movement Research is] an original place of freedom. In the Artist-in-Residence Program, there are no strict boundaries. This is unique. [Elsewhere] even if someone gives you a \$5 space grant, they want to know what you are going to do with that money... You have to have a product. [With MR] there are no rubrics for success. It puts the responsibility on me to build my own rubric [and] define my own space. [They] make that space available for the freedom of creation.*  
—An artist in the focus groups

The measured growth in MR's infrastructure over the next three to five years as guided by this Strategic Plan will increase its capacity to support its mission. This direction calls for a clear-eyed evaluation of all programs, the majority of which were initiated during the late 1980s and early 1990s, to ensure that they vigorously address the current needs of experimental artists and

anticipate future needs. The evaluative process will drive decisions. Because this goal is the most complex of all five, its strategies are presented in some detail:

- Develop an Artist Advisory Committee (AAC) and structure for gathering information about programs from artists, including criteria and definitions for experimentation. This Committee will meet numerous times annually and will include faculty, artists-in-residence, artists who serve as board members, and possibly performers from the Judson Church series.
- Develop support mechanisms for teachers. The city's growing economic challenges for artists strengthen MR's resolve to keep class and workshop fees low and affordable, yet guarantee a minimum fee to teachers. Phased-in support that consists of first a subsidy and later a guaranteed fee will provide a necessary cushion for teachers as they develop both their own teaching abilities and a student base.
- Expand opportunities for artists through partnerships with dance presenters, arts organizations, and/or colleges/universities. This includes exchanges between out of town artists and artists-in-residence where they can perform, teach, and dialogue with other artists.
- Extend the Artist-in-Residence (A.I.R.) Program to two years to provide artists with the necessary time, space, funds and community base to evolve more substantially.
- Revamp marketing strategies to enhance the profile of programs, in order to increase their visibility and utilization. A two-phased marketing plan would include a more interactive website that would more deeply engage the community in aesthetic concerns and would target a growing constituency, including colleges and universities. A first phase, implemented in the near future, would increase visibility for MR's existing programs, reach constituents more consistently and expand its base. A second phase would coincide with securing new space (should this happen), which is addressed in Goal 2.
- Building on its success, consider making modifications to adapt the Judson Church program to current artist needs, to ensure that the series stays true to its intention of fostering experimentation, while also maintaining its high visibility.
- Utilize MR/Publishing to encourage discourse among movement-based artists as well as with artists of other disciplines. Both the online *Critical Correspondence* and hard copy *Performance Journal* will intentionally encourage more interdisciplinary discourse and incorporate MR faculty.
- Create options for Student Residencies that involve long-term, in-depth study, in a manner that would serve artists with a variety of needs. This may eventually include an accredited program for international students.

## **Goal 2. Secure unified space for programs and administration.**

Over the years, Movement Research has identified partnerships with other organizations and individuals to create access to space. The organization has always rented its administrative and studio facilities, and thus been subject to the challenges of New York City real estate and tenant-landlord relationships. As MR expands its Artist-in-Residence Program and increases its class and workshop offerings, it will need to pursue spaces that can both enable these programs to continue and, in the long-run, reunite programs and administration under one roof. In both focus groups, artists were unanimous about how important it is for MR to have a physical home. By establishing a committee to address this important question and conducting research, the board would position itself to make an informed decision about the best option for space with a higher degree of confidence.

**Goal 3. Increase board effectiveness, in order to meet current and future organizational challenges.**

MR will increase the number of board members from 8 to 16 and increase its committees' effectiveness by more equitably sharing workload. In addition to expanding the board, working committees are needed. The Artist Advisory Board would be renamed as the Artist Legacy Board and anchor the organization in its history. To ensure more effective board/staff relations, the board will more clearly articulate its roles and responsibilities and delineate what work and projects the board may take on in a volunteer capacity and what is expected from staff. Lastly, the board will utilize its existing board expectations document to encourage full participation; this document will be used to evaluate current members and recruit new ones.

**Goal 4. Strengthen administration by improving capacity of technological systems and procedures, as well as the capacity and conditions for staff.**

MR's level of activity, remarkable given a modest general operating budget that averaged \$270,000 from FY04-FY06, is largely due to a deeply dedicated, albeit under-compensated and overextended, staff, and a strong work-study and internship program. However, the staff structure and salaries remain inadequate to effectively manage these necessary, but time-intensive, programs and services. The organization's success in the creation of a healthy, sustainable administrative structure will determine its future capability to meet its mission, maintain and grow its services, and provide an efficient and supportive working environment. In both focus groups, this strategy for improving administration was rated the highest of all strategies, indicating that artists clearly recognize this as a high priority.

MR will improve the capacity of personnel, by revamping its structure, pay rates and benefits. Creating new positions will strengthen the organization by supplanting its over-reliance on interns while also increasing its earned income capacity. In addition, MR will improve the capacity of technological systems to enable more efficient administration in a wide variety of ways. Lastly, MR will improve its administrative policies and procedures. MR will enhance its organizational systems by creating a central contact database that houses mailing, e-blast, press, advertisers, students and donor lists; obtaining the software and equipment to produce marketing materials in-house; developing a plan for its archives, storage systems and inventory; and updating its computer network and web design capabilities.

**Goal 5. Increase annual operating budget from \$355,000 in FY07 to \$500,000 by FY10 in accordance with the goals of the Strategic Plan and mission statement.**

In budget projections, capacity building funds will need to be secured to support administration, facility planning, and program expansion. Funds will be expensed over a three-year period, while the organization continues board expansion and strategic, contributed income growth.

MR will develop short- and long-term strategies to increase earned income. Building on growth of income from classes, MELT intensives, a public school program, and a space rental program, MR will increase journal ads and subscriptions, festival attendance, and class attendance. In addition, staff will re-evaluate the class and workshop fee structure. Similarly, it will develop strategies to increase contributed income. MR will create a fundraising committee, a case statement, and an annual fundraising plan. It will expand on its current strategies for cultivating individual donors by increasing board giving, enhancing its annual appeal, expanding its contact database, and by creating a membership program. MR will also revisit its board 'give/get' contribution levels annually. MR will take steps to stabilize the organization's financial base, taking into consideration positioning the organization as a viable capital campaign candidate. MR will seek the advice of outside counsel with expertise in this area.

## **Conclusion**

The planning process has reaffirmed Movement Research's vital role in the development of contemporary artists and art forms. This Plan has laid out a direction, and specified a course of action, that fits the organization's mission and vision while attempting to remain reasonable and feasible. Creating and approving this Plan has strengthened the resolve on the part of the board and staff to fulfill that vision.

Movement Research is deeply grateful to its supporters – the funding community, independent artists, individuals and peer organizations – and looks forward to continuing these partnerships. Such support has been instrumental in enabling this community-based organization to begin to strengthen its administrative infrastructure and more fully nurture, support and sustain the creative work of experimental artists in New York City as they, over time, inform the evolution of dance itself.

Finally, Movement Research is most grateful to the artists, their art and their experimentation, which drives its very existence.